SERMONS

ON

Various Subjects,

PREACHED TO

YOUNG PEOPLE

ON

NEW YEAR'S DAYS.

By WILLIAM MAY.

The Third Edition.

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MDCCLIX.

To thoſe of the RISING GENERATION into whoſe hands theſe Sermons may fall.

THESE plain Diſcourſes are offered to your peruſal, by one who moſt ſincerely and earneſtly wiſhes you a ſafe and comfortable paſſage through this life, and everlaſting happineſs in the next. And if they are but in any degree inſtrumental, by the bleſſing of God, to promote ſuch valuable and important ends, that will be the beſt apology for publiſhing them in the preſent critical and diſcerning age. To this purpoſe I apprehend the ſubjects themſelves inſiſted on are peculiarly ſuitable, whatever deficiency may appear in the handling of them.

In the *firſt* Sermon you are called upon to conſider yourſelves as frail and dying creatures; not to ſpoil the proper reliſh of your exiſtence, and make you melancholy, but to ingage you, at the beginning of life, ſo to number and eſtimate your days, that you may immediately apply your hearts unto true wiſdom. To this very plain and common ſubject I was led at the cloſe of that year in which it had pleaſed God to viſit me in an awful manner, by taking away my neareſt and tendereſt Relations in early life, and laying his hand heavy upon me. Nor could I, upon a review, perſuade myſelf to leave it out of this collection, thinking it might be peculiarly ſuitable to fix ſerious impreſſions on ſome perſons under ſuch kind of afflictions now, as I hope it was when delivered.

In the *ſecond* Sermon you have a lovely example of early piety recommended to you to ingage your imitation, and direct you at firſt into that right path which, as dying and yet immortal creatures, it is your wiſdom, your trueſt intereſt to purſue.

In

In the *third* you are put in mind of the great advantages thoſe of you injoy, who are bleſſed with religious Parents; and the reaſonableneſs of attending to their counſils and inſtructions, as an excellent means to keep you ſteady in the practice of religion and virtue; as well as a powerful motive to quicken you in a holy courſe. And, to ingage your regards and attention to theſe motives the more ſtrictly, I have, on the other hand,

In the *fourth* Diſcourſe ſet before you the melancholy inſtance of *Solomon*'s degeneracy, and departure from the God of his pious Father, and the dreadful aggravations of ſuch a crime. An inſtance this one of the moſt affecting in the Book of God; and which I am perſuaded no young perſon, whoſe conſcience is as yet tender, can ſeriouſly read without ſomething of terror and aſtoniſhment; and I hope will therefore reckon it a moſt inſtructive and awful warning.

The *fifth* Sermon directs you to a ſupreme regard to the holy Scriptures, as containing the moſt excellent rules of life and practice; and as inforcing your obſervance of them, and all other motives laid

before you, with the higheſt authority, and in the ſtrongeſt and moſt perſuaſive manner. Without your Bibles you will be ſadly at a loſs. Your religion and virtue will be ſtrangely imperfect and defective; and your proſpects and hopes as to eternity uncertain and confuſed, if not very dark and gloomy. Take therefore that bleſſed Book, and thankfully uſe it, as the guide of your youth; and then you will find it the comfort and ſolace of your growing years. Let the ſacred pages be your daily meditation, and your greateſt entertainment. Search and embrace the holy Scriptures; for they, and they only, reveal to you the words of eternal life, and the way to obtain it, through faith which is in Chriſt Jeſus our Lord.

And in the *ſixth* Sermon, which ſuppoſes ſome advanced almoſt to maturity, ſuch of you are deſired to look back on all the mercies and kindneſs of God, from the begining of your lives; to conſider what infinite obligations you are under to him; and here upon to devote yourſelves and your remaining years to his honour and glory, as your moſt reaſonable and grateful ſervice.

To this edition I have added two Sermons, one on the *Prayer* of JABEZ, which I would recommend to young perſons as a guide and help to their devotions at that important

portant and intereſting ſeaſon, their *Entrance on the World*; and the other as a deſirably encouraging cloſe to a ſet of Sermons on ſuch occaſions. And as at the end of the firſt edition of theſe Diſcourſes I added that fine Hymn of Mr. ADDISON's as peculiarly ſuited to the *ſixth* Sermon, which it immediately followed, I have yet retained it; becauſe it expreſſes, in the moſt lively manner, the grateful ſentiments of a devout mind through every age, and therefore can never be out of ſeaſon.

And now ſuffer me, with theſe Diſcourſes, to offer you my moſt fervent entreaties that you would, as often as you think proper to caſt a look upon them, conſider the honeſt deſign in them; and reſolve, by the Grace of God, to comply with it, by remembering your Creator in the days of your youth. I beſeech you for God's ſake, for your own ſoul's ſake, for the ſake of your religious Parents or Friends; for the ſake of the world, and of future generations, the happineſs of which will very much depend on your fixing and ſettling in life; I beſeech you, by all theſe ingagements, to conſider what I have propoſed to you, and to know theſe things, ſo as that you may do them.

That

That you may thus conſider, to the moſt valuable practical purpoſes, be perſuaded to allow yourſelves time to conſider. Make conſcience of ſecret devotion, religiouſly preſerve the proper ſeaſons for it; and ſuffer no pleaſure or public diverſion to break in upon that ſacred ſeaſon of retreat, and gradually to render you ſtrangers to a Cloſet. And let me here repeat, what I have already preſſed in the Sermons, and that is an early approach to a ſacramental Table. I cannot help urging this, becauſe I have known and ſeen the peculiar benefit of it in early life. As bad as the world is, I believe it would have been much worſe, if many young perſons had not been held by theſe ſacred bonds to God and a Redeemer; and I am perſwaded that a ſteady attendance on this inſtitution, and eſpecially a growing number of young communicants added to our worſhiping aſſemblies, will be the moſt comfortable preſage that, when the preſent age is paſt, a ſeed ſhall ſerve him, and be advocates for the chriſtian Religion, which ſhall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.

I have nothing further to requeſt than this, that as far as any of you may find

theſe

theſe Sermons of advantage to you, you would not, amidſt your prayers and thankſgivings to God, forget him who has thus endeavoured to ſerve you; as I am ſure, if this ſhould be the happy caſe, I ſhall have abundant reaſon to bow my knee to the God and Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, in thankfulneſs for vouchſafing ſuch ſucceſs to ſuch unworthy means.

Charterhouſe-Street,
March 17. 1753.

WILLIAM MAY.

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SERMON

SERMON I.

The Uncertainty of living through a Year urged as a Motive to early Piety.

JEREMIAH XXVIII. 16.

Thus ſaith the Lord; Behold-------this Year thou ſhalt die.

I BELIEVE it will appear ſomewhat ſtrange and unpleaſant, eſpecially to a young aſſembly, to accoſt them with the tidings of mortality and death at the begining of a New Year, inſtead of congratulating them upon their entrance on it. And, no doubt, unſuitable it would be, if the thoughts of death were deſigned to bring us into bondage before-hand, and no remedy could prevent it. It is true, * *it is appointed unto men once to die*, and the parting ſtroke is ſhocking to human nature; but why ſhould the thoughts of entring into another world by this paſſage be unwelcome to us at any time, when, as

* Heb. ix. 27.

to our continuance here, we are certain of no length of time at all; and, perhaps, *this night our ſouls* may *be required at our hands?* Surely, if we conſider things in a right view, as God, and nature in its ſeveral revolutions, call us to attention, we ought to be ſo far from reckoning the day of death an evil day, and on that account puting it far from us; that on the contrary we ſhould rather prepare for it immediately, and thus be ready to meet it with ſatisfaction and compoſure. This, doubtleſs, has been the deſign of God in all the breaches he has made in our ſeveral families within the year paſt. This is his deſign in ſparing us to the begining of the new one. And this therefore is my aim, in chuſing the words of our text for the ſubject of this diſcourſe. And with the ſame views, I hope, all, eſpecially my young friends, will attend to them; without any fear of being made melancholy, or loſing the true reliſh of the injoyments of their ſtate of trial and probation.

You will eaſily perceive, that the words of the text are, in their primary ſenſe, a threatning denounced againſt *Hananiah*, upon account of his propheſying a lie to the Jews; and the particular term of his death being fixed within a year, ſeems deſigned (as a learned Commentator obſerves) to prove the falſhood of his prophecy; the accompliſhment of which he foretold was to be ‡ *within two years*. Now as *Hananiah* died † *in the ſeventh month*, he was proved to be a deceiver, and the divine authority of the prophet *Jeremiah* was ratified and confirmed.

But I beg leave to accommodate the words in a general view to the ſervices of this day; and, by conſidering the particular circumſtances and ſtate of each of us, point out the great probability there is

‡ Ver. 11. † Ver. 17.

is of the words of this prediction being verified upon ſome of us, even the moſt gay and vigorous, before this returning ſeaſon. I ſhall therefore conſider the ſubject in the following manner.

I. As this awful determination has been actually accompliſhed upon all the vaſt multitudes that are gone into eternity the paſt year.

II. As it will be alſo verified this year upon many who are now living; and may, probably, be ſo upon ſome of the young in this aſſembly. And then

III. Endeavour to point out the influence, which ſuch a conſideration ought to have upon us all, to direct us both in our temper and practice.

I. I am to conſider the words of my text, as they have been actually accompliſhed upon the vaſt multitudes that are gone into eternity the laſt year.

As to them, the decree has broke forth, and the awful ſentence been irreverſibly paſt——And, as to them, we are to think of death as having taken them out of a world in which they had converſed, been pleaſed, and acquainted with creatures of the ſame make, and in the ſame circumſtances, with themſelves——as having put a full ſtop to all the thoughts and purpoſes of their hearts with reference to their future years, eſpecially the next——and laſtly (that which is infinitely more important than all the reſt) as having cloſed the year of their trial and probation, as candidates for

an eternal world, and fixed their ſtate beyond all poſſibility of a change.

1. We are to conſider all thoſe, who are by the divine appointment dead the laſt year, as having left this world, which they had converſed in, and were acquainted with; and gone to another, in a great meaſure an unknown ſtate.

This notion is as true, I confeſs, with regard to all the generations of men, that have paſſed away from the begining, as to thoſe who are gone only the paſt year; but the confining the thought now to that particular period, which I am upon, may, perhaps, fix our attention more cloſely, as we are uſually more affected with what happens in our own time, and in ſome ſtated and fixed portions of it, than we are only upon the reflexion on long-paſt events, or reading of the dead a thouſand years ago.

And how great the number that have thus left our world in ſo ſhort a ſpace! How much increaſed the multitude in the laſt year, in proportion to many others that have been before! How numerous the inhabitants that have been waſhed down the ſtream of time in its ſtrong and powerful current! Thouſands have ſunk down on our right hand, and ten thouſands on our left! And they have all left their native country, the place of their parentage and education, where they *lived among their own people*; and gone down to a land of ſilence and darkneſs; * *a land of darkneſs, as darkneſs itſelf, and of the ſhadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkneſs.* Thoſe of them who had lived many years before, and were fully ſettled in their habitations, have been

* Job. x. 22.

been lately removed; the *places that knew them*, the friends they had ſo long converſed with, ſhall † *know them no more for ever*; ‡ *nor ſhall they behold man any more with the inhabitants of the earth.* And as for the young, who were juſt come to look abroad in the world, and were about to chuſe their ſettlement; ſuch who had but lately contracted an acquaintance with their fellow-mortals, and began to feel a reliſh for the entertainments of life, and think it was good to be here for many years to come; they are deprived of the reſidue of their years, ſcarce known to others before they are ſtruck out of the book of the living, and forgotten from off the face of the earth.—With them alſo the ties of nature are broken; and all thoſe endearments, which linked them more to this world, made it, if poſſible, look more like their home, and rendered the thoughts of leaving it more unwelcome, are all diſſolved too. The family that, at the begining of this year, could boaſt of the honourable names of Father and Mother, the endearing relations of Brother and Siſter, or that *Friend that ſticks cloſer than both*, are now mourning the want of them; and feel themſelves that they have loſt them, though they may not be miſſed in the crowd. While the dead relation hath been forced to burſt all the bands aſunder, and knows nothing more of the ſoft and powerful ingagements. The duſt of the neareſt kindred and of the ſtranger are alike blended and undiſtinguiſhable.

But whither are they gone? Are all who are thus departed in this ſhort compaſs of time, gone for ever from this world? And have they taken a final leave? Or are they only tranſported to ſettle as a diſtant colony, where they ſhall have the ſame acquaintance and enjoyments, and the ſame

† Job vii. 10. ‡ Iſa. xxxviii. 10.

relations and ties of friendſhip? Alas, not ſo; for their dwelling place is quite removed from off the earth, and they are paſſed into an unknown ſtate. * *They have given up the ghoſt, and where are they?* The body, as was before hinted, is gone to duſt; and if the other part, the ſoul, ſlept there with it, they would be vaniſhed like a dream indeed. But reaſon and philoſophy (without taking in the ſcriptures) will allow us to think, that theſe two old companions are ſeparated at this time too: that while the man, conſidered in both parts of his nature, is torn away from the world, the ſoul, that rendered the body capable of all the enjoyments and relations of life, is taken from the body, and carried to a ſeparate ſtate, which is a ſtrange and unknown country; and the way to it is a way that it never went before. Since the goſpel diſcovery, which † *has brought life and immortality to light*, our knowledge into the other world is opened, and our faith eſtabliſhed and ſtrengthened as chriſtians; but ſtill, as we know every thing but in part, and the other ſtate in ſo little a part, we may very well confeſs our ignorance; and we cannot be much wiſer while we dwell in theſe bodies of fleſh and blood. What idea have we of a ſpirit without a body? How little are we acquainted with the manner of its exiſtence! How can we conceive of the hearing without an ear; ſeeing without an eye; converſing without the organs of ſpeech? What are the ſpecial employments of ſeparate ſpirits? How do they reliſh pleaſure, or feel pain, without any thing of ſenſe about them?—Theſe things are in a great meaſure unknown to us; for no one ever came from the dead to give a diſtinct account; nor did he who was *caught up into the third heaven*, bring back

* Job xiv. 10. † 2 Tim. i. 10.

back again with him any ſtrange and unheard of tidings.

And yet, as ſtrange and unknown as this other ſtate is in itſelf, the generality of mankind are ſtill willing to be more ignorant of it, by confining all their attention to ſenſible things; and never liking to entertain any thoughts or apprehenſions of their paſſing into it, till they are juſt about to leave their own iſland, and obliged to launch forth into the boundleſs ocean, whether they will or no.

2. As to thoſe who are gone out of our world the laſt year, we may conſider death as having put a full period to all their ſchemes and deſigns for future years; eſpecially this next, on which we are entered.

Under this view *Job* alſo conſidereth death; * *My days*, ſaith he, *are paſt, my purpoſes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart.* As we are reaſonable creatures, we are capable of reflecting on time paſt, and of thinking and forming reſolutions for futurity. And even as to this world, theſe thoughts and reſolutions are not faulty, when they are kept within due bounds. The ſituation of mankind, and their circumſtances here, their relations and alliances oblige them to exerciſe their reaſoning powers in order to anſwer their common and natural obligations. But then, there are other thoughts and purpoſes, which are leſs neceſſary; nay vain and imaginary, and often faulty and ſinful.—I might inlarge on each of theſe diſtinctly; but ſhall rather hint at the purpoſes of men in general, which have been interrupted this laſt year, by the death of the perſons who formed them.

The

* Job xvii. 11.

The young, perhaps, ſet out at the begining of it with a lively and vigorous conſtitution, imagining that they ſhould have a long time before them; that as their reliſh for worldly pleaſures was ſtrong, upon their firſt acquaintance, ſo their ſtrength and vigour would increaſe with their years, and their hopes riſe continually; and therefore they purpoſed to live in eaſe and pleaſure, and make the beſt of their youth, for *walking in the ways of their heart, and the ſight of their eyes.* But they found, to their fatal diſappointment, their ſtrength weakened in the way, their days ſhortened, and their lives cut off at once; or only protracted a few months, to teach them more ſenſibly their own frailty and folly. Juſt as the mariner, who ſets out in a new veſſel well built, and with a proſperous gale, thinks he ſhall ride over all the ſea without an unfriendly blaſt, at leaſt a dangerous one; and therefore ſits ſecure and fearleſs of danger, pleaſing himſelf with the thoughts of the rich freight he ſhall bring home; when, all at once the clouds gather, an unexpected ſtorm burſts upon him, and either ſhatters the bark, and drowns the owner; or elſe forces him upon a plank to ſome lonely coaſt, where he continues a little while to reflect on his condition, and then dies with greater anguiſh and pain.

Another perſon might enter upon the year with thoughts of greater ſucceſs in his buſineſs, and raiſing his family in a ſpeedy manner; but, e'er he was well engaged, death has ſtopped the circulation of buſineſs, and prevented all the riches that were to be laid up for his friends and his children.

Another, after he had ſucceeded, and increaſed his ſubſtance according to his wiſhes, might begin the year with the thoughts of injoying the fruits of his labour; and therefore leaves off his buſi-

buſineſs, and begins to enlarge his dwelling, and build for his ſucceſſors, with this ſecret thought, that he had goods laid up in ſtore for remaining years; when yet, perhaps, ſoon after he had laid the foundation, death arreſted him in his work, and the unfiniſhed building remains a monument of the frailty and vanity of the maſter.

Some perſons, I doubt not, and even among the young too, began, and went on through part of the year with purpoſes for God and religion; death, it is true, hath broken them alſo; but if they were ſincere, it was, not to make the memory of them periſh from God, but haſten the full and compleat reward of them. But

3. We may conceive of the determination in the text being fulfilled on all that are dead the paſt year, as having cloſed their ſeaſon of trial and probation; and fixed them in an unalterable ſtate of exiſtence.

This is the moſt important conſideration of all. That the preſent is only an introduction to a future ſtate, is a matter paſt all diſpute with every man that hath not ſo far debauched his reaſon and conſcience by a courſe of vice, as to make it his intereſt, that annihilation be preferable to after-exiſtence. With the reſt of mankind, it is to be taken for granted that they know not how to underſtand, or account for their own powers and capacities, and the adminiſtrations of Providence in this world, without a conſtant reference to futurity. And to all ſuch the preſent world will appear only a ſtate of trial and probation; and they judge that to this end, God, who places them here, affords them various advantages for their improvement; that they may paſs their trial well, and receive a full and eternal

reward

reward at laſt. Now death puts a final period to all theſe means and advantages, and fixes the ſoul in the unchangeable ſtate. * *For as it is appointed unto men once to die*, ſo *after death the judgment*; when each particular departed ſpirit is fixed in that place either of eaſe and happineſs, or of anguiſh and miſery, and with ſuch ſociety, as is moſt ſuitable to thoſe diſpoſitions with which it inhabited the body, and left it. For into theſe two apartments is the whole inviſible world divided; and the paſſage from the one to the other is unpaſſable, becauſe there ‖ *is a great gulph fixed.*

Now to think of the many thouſand ſouls that, only in the laſt year, have crouded into this eternal ſtate, as thus unalterably fixed, (as we muſt conclude in the general, though it is not our work to decide as to particular perſons) that as ſoon as ever † *that mighty Lord, who hath the keys of death and the unſeen world*, opened the door upon them, their ſpirits went immediately to their own proper place; either an abode with the holy angels, and pure and friendly ſpirits, where they feel the moſt ſtrong and powerful influences of the divine love; or with the devil and his angels, thoſe accurſed enemies to God and goodneſs, full of malignity, and waiting with horror the heavy doom of the laſt day; how awful the thought!—In this view of things, which to me appears a true one, what a great and mighty thing is it to die! And what an important year has that been with thoſe, to whom it has proved their laſt! They are dead out of our world, from the pleaſure and buſineſs of this life, in which ‡ *they have walked in a vain ſhew*; but they are not loſt; they have in the other world the moſt ſerious and weighty buſineſs, and what holds them to an everlaſting attention. They

* Heb. ix. 27. ‖ Luke xvi. 26. † Rev. i. 18.
‡ Pſal. xxxix. 6.

They are dead from under the means of grace, and the ordinances of the goſpel; and they have, long e'er this time, found that it has either been ‖ *a ſavour of life unto life, or of death unto death.* † *He that was holy, remains holy ſtill*; and he that departed filthy, is for ever filthy and abominable. The young ſinner has found himſelf taken, perhaps at once, from the heat of an intemperate riot, or a debauch, and placed at the bar of an holy God, with ſhame and endleſs confuſion. And the old tranſgreſſor, after the ax had lain at the root of the tree a long while, is cut down as a cumberer of the ground, and caſt as dry fuel into that fire, which God has kindled in his anger. But this brings me to the next general head.

II. To enlarge on the words of the text, as we may be perſuaded they will be verified on ſome in this next year, and may, probably, be ſo on ſome of the young in this aſſembly. It is morally certain that (to ſpeak of God after the manner of man) he has determined concerning ſome, *This Year ye ſhall die.*

* *As by one man ſin entered into the world, and death by ſin, and death upon all men*; ſo every annual revolution, ſince the apoſtacy, has witneſſed to the death of many of the inhabitants of this earth; and the ſucceſſion of generations ſhews, in one view, the wiſdom of God in appointing the death of the preceding. And whoever may pretend himſelf an infidel as to death in general, in the ſpace of a year may probably be made a ſound believer againſt his will. But that which I would conſider chiefly here, is the probability of this being the laſt year to ſome one or other of the young

‖ 2 Cor. ii. 16. † Rev. xxii. 11. * Rev. v. 12.

young in this aſſembly. Now this probability ariſes from the uncertainty of life in every age. † *Boaſt not thyſelf of to morrow, for thou knoweſt not what a day may bring forth.* ‡ *For what is your life? It is as a vapour, which appeareth for a little while, and then vaniſheth away.* Were none ever gathered to the grave, but ſuch as are full of days, was every one permitted to ſtruggle through ſickneſs, till he arrived at one particular period; and were there none, or very few exceptions, then indeed there would be room for the young to build their hopes on ſeveral years to come. Yet even upon ſuch a ſuppoſition, they would not diſcover great wiſdom by reckoning the years of this life a long time, when they are after all ſoon cut off; and appear, on the review, very ſhort, and to be paſſed only as *a watch in the night.* But now when we behold * *one dying in his full ſtrength, when his breaſts are full of milk, and his bones moiſtened with marrow, as often as another in the bitterneſs of his ſoul,* worn out with age and infirmities, nay, when we obſerve the greater part of mankind dying in their infancy, or before they come to maturity; and when we conſider the multitudes, that, without the leaſt diſtinction of age, are every year cut off; the youngeſt of us may ſtand amazed at his being alive this day, and reckon it a wonder that he is not gone down into the pit; eſpecially, when his conſtitution is pretty much the ſame, and his circumſtances in life can never prevent it. And when the odds are ſo great, I am ſure, the degrees of probability muſt riſe very high, and be a kind of proof to baffle all our gay and vain imaginations. In ſome caſes the ignorance of futurity may be made uſe of as an argument either for, or againſt, the probability of what

† Prov. xxvii. 1. ‡ James iv. 14. * Job xvi. 23, 24, 25.

what we apprehend may come to paſs; juſt as we like one ſide of the queſtion better than the other. But our not knowing whether we ſhall die this year or not, is far from being a ſolid reaſon to think that we ſhall live through it. How reaſonably then, upon the whole, is it to be ſuppoſed, that ſuch a prediction within this period may thus awfully be accompliſhed! How probable is it, that the great Lord of life and death may pronounce the deciſive word upon ſome of you, *This year thou ſhalt die!* While the *angel, who holds the book*, and reads the ſentence, *lifts up his hand to heaven*, * *and ſwears by him that liveth for ever and ever*, that, as to thee, it ſhall be thy cloſing ſeaſon, and *time ſhall be no longer*. To ſome perhaps ſome months of the year, to others a few weeks, and to another only ſome days, and from thenceforward ſickneſs, and pain, and all thoſe miniſters of death ſhall begin to work more ſtrongly in you; till, at the appointed ſeaſon, the ſprightly, the healthful † *countenance is changed, and you ſhall be ſent away.*

As then this may be our caſe, it is very proper to conſider, that, if it ſhould, death will either be inflicted in diſpleaſure, or ſent as a favour.

1. We may conſider the ſentence in the text as what may be executed, on ſome of thoſe who die this year, in a way of diſpleaſure.

This was the immediate ſenſe of it with reference to *Hananiah*, as was obſerved before; *Behold, this year thou ſhalt die, becauſe thou haſt taught rebellion againſt the Lord.* This was indeed peculiar to him. But death in general is to be conſidered as a puniſhment, ſince it ‡ *paſſes upon all men, for that all have ſined.* It continues to paſs

* Rev. x. 6. † Job xiv. 20. ‡ Rom. v. 12.

on even the righteous for wiſe reaſons, but is a dreadful puniſhment as it paſſes upon the incorrigible and unrepenting. And perhaps it is on this account, thy days are likely to be ſhortened. "There is a young tranſgreſſor, who, inſtead of "ſeeking after God his Maker, has made an early "progreſs in iniquity; and if I let him alone, he "will ſtill harden himſelf more and more; and, "inſtead of being a bleſſing, will prove a curſe "in his generation; cut him down, tho' a green "tree; for why ſhould he ſtand longer to poiſon "the ſoil, and cover the ground with a black and "deadly ſhade? —— There is another, who, "though he hath not been quite ſo remarkably "ſinful, yet never once has been thoughtful and "ſerious; he has been planted in my houſe, edu-"cated well, ſtriven with by my Spirit, exhorted "by parents and friends, but he never would "be perſuaded to remember his Creator in early "years, nor to act agreeably to the nature and "advantages I had given him: and now vanity "gets a ſtronger hold, and his heart grows harder; "*this year*, therefore, *thou ſhalt die*; for why ſhould "a God wait always on thy trifling and impertinence?" O, what a groan would ariſe from every guilty breaſt in this aſſembly, if it did but hear ſuch a voice, and ſee the hand-writing upon the wall over-againſt him, * *Thou art weighed in the ballance, and art found wanting!* † *Thy years are determined*, and *the number of thy months* in *this* year, *that thou canſt not paſs!*——"And muſt it "be ſo ſoon? Not this year, Lord!—O ſtay "thy hand! Let me alone this year alſo; and "then, if, after all, I remain unholy and diſo-"bedient, after that cut me down."

2. Your

* Dan. v. 27. † Job xiv. 3.

2. Your dying this year may be in mercy and favour to you.

* *The righteous are taken away from the evil to come.* Though you may be *deprived of the reſidue of your years on earth*, yet God, who foreſeeth all things, may behold ſuch ſtorms and tempeſts, ſuch trials and difficulties, as if they ſhould fall upon thee, would make thy remaining years ſadly uncomfortable, and all thy ſtrength labour and ſorrow. It is with a kind deſign therefore that he calls thee hence ſo ſoon, and will beſtow ſo early a reward upon thy virtue. But it is now time

III. To proceed to the cloſe of this ſubject, which will be by ſhewing what influence the conſiderations already ſuggeſted ought to have upon our minds.—To this purpoſe, I might go over each head again, and point out the influence which each diſtinct view of death ought to have upon us. As it is a removal from a world in which we have long converſed, and been acquainted, into another, in a great meaſure, an unknown ſtate; I might ſhew, how neceſſary it is to live here like pilgrims and ſtrangers, to looſen our affections from theſe things, which we know we muſt e'er long part with; and to inure ourſelves, by frequent meditation, to the thoughts of that ſtate to which we are going. As in the day of death all the thoughts and purpoſes of our hearts, as to time, vaniſh, I might ſay, how becoming it would be never to lay any great ſchemes for this little point of exiſtence; but always to determine for future time, according to the apoſtle's direction, † *If the Lord will, we will do this or that.*

* Iſa. lvii. 1. † Jam. iv. 15.

But I chuſe now to confine myſelf to that one particular view, which is of the greateſt importance, and that is, the conſideration of death as a period to our ſtate of trial, and fixing our ſouls in an unchangeable ſtate; and as that which will infallibly be our caſe, if this year ſhould be the laſt to any of us.

And all that I have to ſay is this, ſettle it in your minds that it may be your caſe; and then endeavour to behave as you will wiſh you had done, if it ſhould prove ſo.

For once admit the conviction, that it may be your caſe; and be aſſured, you are very unwiſe if, having ſo many odds againſt you, you do not. You may, perhaps, have entered on one new year after another in times paſt, without ſuffering the thought; or, if it has come acroſs your minds, you may have diſmiſſed it as an unwelcome meſſenger. And, probably, ſome of you may have come here this day, not ſo much with the thoughts of dying upon your minds, as of living longer in the world, and deſigning to practiſe what you now attend upon in future years, if you do not forget it before-hand. But now my buſineſs is to perſuade you to believe that you may not ſee another year. Suffer the word of exhortation then; and, as you love ſometimes to be looking into futurity, inſtead of ſtretching your proſpects to old age, look nearer home; look only into this year that is coming on, and upon yourſelves as thoſe who may not live to reach the cloſe of it. And when you have ſtriped yourſelves in imagination of all your enjoyments, and as it were felt, before-hand, ſomething of the parting ſtroke between body and ſoul, think that it will be the effect of the divine diſpleaſure, or favour, with reference to a long eternity.

And

And then, as ever you would have your death the effect of mercy, and not of judgment, be ſolicitous above all things to get ready for it immediately; that let it come, not only this year, but even at the begining of it, you may not be ſurprized. And how can you otherwiſe be prepared, than by a hearty unfeigned repentance of all your ſins, and ſecuring an intereſt in the Lord Jeſus, who has died to take away the ſting of that mortal enemy, and who alone can give you a compleat victory? See then, that you take this method of God's providing, and comply with it ſpeedily; that ſo you may avoid the much ſeverer pangs of the ſecond death, which is eternal. To this purpoſe begin the new year, and the firſt day of it with ſuch a temper.

But you may ſay, "Will not this marr all my "fancied pleaſure? Will it not make a ſad breach "upon all my gay hours, which I laid out to this "particular ſeaſon? To quit my company, leave "my diverſions, enter into my cloſet, and ſhut "my door, and pore upon death and the grave. "It is a hard thing, who can bear it?"

I only anſwer; that if you have never been thus ſeriouſly imployed before, it is high time now this day to begin. It is time to ſtep aſide from noiſe and mirth, from revellings and vain amuſements, if thou haſt been ingaged in nothing elſe worthy of a reaſonable creature all thy paſt years; and thou knoweſt not, but that the grave is juſt ready, and the judge ſo near that he is ſtanding before the door. Beſides, if, upon ſuch a warning as this, you are ſetting your ſouls in order now, you are laying in the beſt proviſion for the enjoyment of this life, as long as it laſts, and laying up in ſtore a good foundation againſt this time appointed too. Be then perſuaded this day to reſolve for God, and to turn to him with full purpoſe of heart; and

do that (by God's aſſiſtance which is ſtill offered you) now, which, if you neglect, you may ſoon be undone for ever. Do not adjourn the conviction till your laſt ſickneſs ſhall ſeize you; for, though it may be lingering, it will be very unſeaſonable to think then only of begining to live to God, when you will need all the ſtrength of the man, and vigour and grace of the chriſtian, to enable you to die well. Some of you may have learnt this more ſenſibly in the removal of your friends the laſt year, and by them ſeen the advantage and neceſſity of laying in for this important ſeaſon before it comes. You may have ſtood perhaps by a dying Brother, or the laſt pillow of an expiring Siſter, and amidſt the ſobs of a failing heart, and the laſt ſtruggles of nature, have heard ſuch broken accents as theſe —— "It "is a hard and great thing to die. But, bleſſed "be God, my work is juſt finiſhed. Do you, "who are in health, take warning, and get rea-"dy now, for you will find this a ſerious and a "buſy hour indeed."—O that ſuch a call, not from the pulpit only, but from the dying friend, might at length prevail with you to be ſo wiſe, as from henceforth * to *conſider your latter end!*

And having been prevailed with to conſider it in the general, in order to ſtrengthen your preparation, and ſhew yourſelves ſincere, give yourſelves up to a Redeemer at his holy Table. This I would particularly urge with my young friends, who have before been in ſome reſpects thoughtful about another world, and began, it may be, this laſt year with ſome purpoſes of ſuch a ſervice before the end of it; but unhappily, through ſome interruption, or trifling excuſe, they have finiſhed it without complying. Let not this returning year witneſs to repeated delays. For be aſſured,

* Deut. xxxii. 29.

aſſured, if death ſhould ſeize you, though in other reſpects you may have comfort, yet this neglect will terrify an awakened mind in that ſeaſon, and make your laſt bed very reſtleſs and uneaſy. I doubt not but every one of you would be willing not only to die ſafely, but with comfort and pleaſure too; do then yield up yourſelves to God thro' a Redeemer, and come under the bonds of the covenant; and endeavour to live agreably to the ſacred engagements. And then, when the laſt hour ſhall come, you may look through the ruins of a droping body, as *Stephen* did through the ſhower of ſtones falling on him, and by faith * *ſee the glory of God, and Jeſus ſtanding at his right hand*, ready to receive you: and, † *knowing in whom you have believed*, and obeyed, may perform the laſt work of a chriſtian in all its decency and grandeur, by commiting yourſelves to him in that day, in the language of that ſaint too, ſaying, ‡ *Lord Jeſus, receive my ſpirit!* AMEN.

* Acts vii. 55. † 2 Tim. i. 12. ‡ Acts vii. 59.

SERMON

SERMON II.

The amiable Character of JOSIAH conſidered.

2 CHRON. XXXIV. 3.

In the eighth Year of his Reign, while he was yet Young, he began to ſeek after the God of David *his Father.*

THE practice of true religion and virtue is ſo reaſonable in itſelf, and ſo admirably ſuited to refine and exalt the human nature, that one would think the bare knowledge of it ſhould ingage our yielding to the power thereof; or that one exhortation at the moſt ſhould be abundantly ſufficient. But ſuch is the power of cuſtom, ſuch the ſtrength of appetites and paſſions, and ſuch the deceitfulneſs of ſin, that the allurements of virtue are often loſt, and the moſt powerful exhortations and entreaties to the practice of it become unſucceſsful. Men are ſtill apt to raiſe objections againſt the difficulties of religion, and, through an indulged faulty apprehenſion of them, to decline, and to refuſe the ſervice. But now, when an example of virtue breaks out upon them, when a good man appears in a wicked perverſe world with all his religion about him; when amidſt all temptations, he maintains a ſupreme regard to God

God and piety, he at once ſilences all theſe clamours, and leaves the indolent and careleſs without the leaſt excuſe, while he encourages others to a lively and vigorous imitation. And as thoſe who are in the heat and vigour of youth are generally leſs inclined to a life of piety and the ſtrictneſs of religion, through the love of novelty, and a thirſt after worldly and ſenſible good; ſo if I can but produce an example of a perſon, in the ſame age of life, who has broke through all theſe and much greater ſnares and difficulties, and by his early religion excelled many others who were arrived at maturity; I ſhall convince you of the practicableneſs of religion even at this ſeaſon, and the lovelineſs of the practice; and if you are not won over to it, leave you altogether ſpeechleſs and inexcuſable. As therefore I am called with this returning day to the ſpecial ſervices of the young, I cannot better expreſs my wiſhes and congratulations, than by ſeting before you this bright example of early religion in the text, and telling you, it is my heart's deſire and prayer, that at the begining of this new year, whatever has been your former conduct, you may now in earneſt *ſeek after the Lord God of your Fathers*, and reſolve *to ſerve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind.*

In the words before us there are two things, which offer themſelves to our diſtinct conſideration.

I. The account given of the piety of JOSIAH, and the particular repreſentation of it, by his *ſeeking after the God of* David *his Father.*

II. The ſeaſon of life, when he diſcovered this regard to religion; together with the attending circumſtances that rendered his virtue and goodneſs at this period, ſo remarkably amiable and lovely. *In the eighth Year of hi*

Reign

Reign, while he was yet Young, he began to *ſeek after the God* of his pious anceſtors.

And when we have conſidered theſe diſtinctly, we may ſeriouſly apply the ſubject for our preſent improvement, and the aſſiſting our growing virtue.

I. The firſt thing that offers itſelf to our conſideration is, the account given of the piety of JOSIAH; and the particular repreſentation of it, as *ſeeking after the God of David his Father*. Here let us inquire a little into the phraſe of *ſeeking God*; and then the character, under which God is here repreſented.

Seeking God, in the ſcriptures, is uſed ſometimes in a more limited, and at others in a more general ſenſe. It is ſometimes uſed to ſignify an addreſs to God by prayer and ſupplication. Thus *Job* ſaith, * *I would ſeek unto God, and to God I would commit my cauſe*; where the laſt part of the verſe is an explanation of the former; intimating, that ſeeking God was to look up to him for counſel and direction, and to truſt in him in all our ways. But it is very often put in general for the whole of religion; as is the fear and the love of God, *&c.* and with equal reaſon; for as when theſe paſſions of the ſoul are ingaged and attached to God and religion, they draw over all the other affections to the ſame glorious intereſt; ſo when a perſon is repreſented as *ſeeking after God*, it intimates ſuch a diſpoſition of mind, as will ingage him to the practice of every act of religion in earneſt, that he may not be diſappointed in the ſearch, and loſe his hopes. It is in this general ſenſe that, I apprehend, the phraſe is uſed in the text;

* Job v. 8.

text; ſo that JOSIAH's *begining to ſeek after God*, implies his fixed reſolution for God and goodneſs; and his deliberate entrance upon a religious life after ſerious reflexion. And in this general view of the words, we may apprehend them as ſuited to direct and influence our conduct.

God indeed * *is not far from any one of us, for in him we live, and move, and have our being*; nor need we go far to find him, for he never *leaves himſelf without witneſs*, in that he is conſtantly *doing us good*, † *giving us rain from heaven, and fruitful ſeaſons, and filling our hearts with food and gladneſs*; ſo that we need but open our eyes, to behold an ever preſent God. But it is not thus with the generality; they are inattentive to all theſe things, and are as much *without God in the world*, as if he was at the greateſt diſtance, and the furtheſt remove from them. The man therefore that does, amidſt all the ſin and wickedneſs in the world, look through the clouds of fleſh and ſenſe to the great eternal Being, and pay his proper regards to him, may well be ſaid to ſeek after God. And he diſcovers this true temper and diſpoſition in the following manner; in a full conviction of the excellency and ſuitableneſs of the bleſſed God and his favour to a creature in his circumſtances, after the moſt ſerious and deliberate reflexions; in earneſt and inſatiable deſires after him, and an intereſt in his favour; and in uſing all the methods preſcribed to obtain this moſt excellent and invaluable bleſſing.

1. Seeking God implies a full conviction of the excellency and ſuitableneſs of the bleſſed God, as a portion and happineſs to ſuch creatures as we are, upon the moſt cool and deliberate reflexions.

For

* Acts xvii. 27, 28. † Ch. xiv. 17.

For to what end are we ſuppoſed to ſeek, but only to promote our own happineſs, and real advantage in the ſearch? The very idea of ſeeking always points out an object which, either in reality or imagination, appears worthy the moſt vigorous purſuit. Now all the controverſy is this, which is the true object, and moſt worthy the inquiry, the choice of a reaſonable being? Shall I appeal to my hearers? I will, and let us who are young ſpeak firſt; let the forwardneſs of our youthful ſpirits here either appear with honour, or elſe be branded this day with reproach. Say then, what do we, who are young, and have our ſpirits free, our paſſions ſtrong, our deſires loud and importunate, what do we want? What is the object of our ſearch? Is it not ſomething that may ſatisfy theſe deſires, that may gratify our higheſt ambition, and ſilence all our moſt paſſionate wiſhes? i. e. is it not true happineſs? This then we all agree to be the thing in purſuit; though different methods are unhappily taken for the acquirement, and many of us are too apt to be dazzled with preſent appearances. When we firſt enter on the chaſe, and behold a fine open country before us, in which ten thouſand objects agreable to ſenſe preſent themſelves, the novelty ſtrikes the imagination; and we fancy, could we but graſp them in our arms, our hearts would never be void of any joy. In a little time, perhaps, we reach one deſirable object, and find that inſtead of ſubſtance we embrace a ſhadow and empty vanity. And after the firſt diſappointment, inſtead of reflexion, we preſs forward the more warmly, the paſſions riſe in the conteſt, and we paſs on to the next gay appearance, till we are daſhed and defeated again; every diſappointment leaving this legible inſcription, "that true happineſs is not "to be found in me." For the reaſon of the fatal

tal miſtake here is not ſo much from the object, as from looking at it with a falſe glaſs, and in a wrong light. We firſt make an idol out of our own fancy, and then are angry that it is not a God of infinite perfection. For after all we ſhall learn, that nothing ſhort of ſuch a Being can fully ſupply the wants of a human ſoul.

Now it is the ſtrong and powerful conviction of this truth that leads a ſoul to God, to ſeek him, and him only. A perſon of this temper, from a ſurvey of the world, and from the experience, the dear-bought experience, of a thouſand generations before him, and from examining his own heart and deſires, will come to ſuch a concluſion as this.

" I find I am an indigent dependent creature, " and at the ſame time have wants that no mor- " tal, no created good, I believe can ſatisfy; be- " cauſe, by what I have already experienced " from that, it is the novelty chiefly creates the " pleaſure and ſhort lived ſatisfaction; and from " the teſtimony of all ages, I find the important " queſtion ſtill returns, where is happineſs to " be found? And where is the place of true un- " periſhable felicity? This is what I want; " this is what I muſt find, or muſt, from my na- " tural capacity, be for ever miſerable. It is not " wholly in myſelf, any more than in external " ſenſible good. It muſt then deſcend from an " infinitely perfect independent Being, or it can " never be injoyed; and that it ſhould not be " found, is the ſtrangeſt ſuppoſition of all, when " I have in myſelf an inſatiable thirſt after it. " Now where is this Being, or who is it but God, " and him alone? It is he, that is my Maker, " who gave me theſe powers, that can alone ſa- " tisfy them; and it is the injoyment of him a-

" lone that I find can yield this ſatisfaction. " I am convinced fully, that it is in him alone; " and therefore to him, as the only ſuitable object, " will I direct all my views, and from him only " expect my happineſs to be compleated."

Something like this was, no doubt, the temper of the excellent perſon in my text. He wanted true ſolid felicity, an intereſt in a friend who could anſwer the demands of an immortal ſoul. One would have thought that if any perſon ſhould have been eaſy and contented, ſuch a one, who was a King, beloved and honoured by his ſubjects, ſhould have bid the faireſt for this tranquility and eaſe. But amidſt all he feels a chaſm within that his crown and kingdom, his riches and honours of this world could never fill up; and under this conviction he looks upward, and begins to ſeek after God. And then

2. This further implies earneſt and inſatiable deſires after God, and an intereſt in his favour.

Theſe are the natural conſequences of the former head; and the deſires will riſe in proportion to the ſtrength of the conviction on the mind of the excellency and ſuitableneſs of the bleſſed God to be a portion and felicity to us. And thus in ſcripture, this diſpoſition, this deſire is expreſſed by *hungring* and *thirſting*, *longing* and *panting* with the greateſt vehemence. * *Whom have I in heaven but thee?* ſays Aſaph, *and there is none upon earth that I deſire beſides*, or in compariſon with, *thee.* † *As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, ſo panteth my ſoul after thee, O God! My ſoul thirſteth for God, for the living God.* ‡ *There be many that ſay, who will ſhew us any good?* but, *Lord,* created

* Pſa. lxxiii. 25. † Pſa. xlii. 1, 2. ‡ Pſa. iv. 6, 7.

created good will not ſatisfy me; I am reſtleſs till thou *lift up the light of thy countenance upon me*; this will *put* more *gladneſs into my heart*, than the *increaſe of corn and wine*, and *oyl*, can afford to the men of this world. And then

3. Will follow a diligent and unwearied uſe of the means appointed for obtaining this bleſſing of God's favour, and ſecuring the continuance of it.

This is the only way to ſhow that our conviction of this truth is ſtrong and impreſſive, and our deſires after God genuine and ſincere; that we do not content ourſelves in ſloth and indolence, in mere lazy wiſhes, but exert our reaſoning powers, and have recourſe to the means preſcribed by God for our direction and aſſiſtance. And in this way did JOSIAH eminently ſhew himſelf to be ſincere in his ſearch. No ſooner did he begin the inquiry, but immediately you find he put away every thing that he knew would hinder him and was contrary to his deſign, or inconſiſtent with his ſeeking after the true God. Thus he ſet himſelf, as a King, to purge the land from idolatry; and *they* * *brake down the altars of Baalim in his preſence, and cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Iſrael.* Then he endeavoured to correct his own life by the rule of *God's word*; and when † *the book of the law was found, and read, he mourned* for the paſt deviations from it; and made that his directory and inſtructor in the remainder of his time, indeavouring to walk in a cloſer and more ſtrict obedience. And then, to fix his good purpoſes and reſolutions ſtill more ſtrongly in him, and ingage him to greater watchfulneſs and circumſpection, to greater diligence

* 2 Chron. xxxiv. 4, 7. † Ver. 18, 19.

and perſevering goodneſs, you find, in the cloſe of the chapter, the * *King ſtood in his place, in the houſe of the Lord, and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments and teſtimonies, and his ſtatutes, with all his heart, and with all his ſoul, to perform the words of the covenant written in this book.* And the conſequence of all this was according to his aim; for you find, afterwards it is ſaid, that † *all his days the people of Iſrael departed not from following the Lord God of their Fathers.*

Thus now, would we ſeek God in earneſt, we muſt renounce every ſin, and hate every falſe way; for we can never find him in the paths of iniquity. The love to folly and vanity, the ſtrong affection for ſenſual good, that ſpiritual idolatry, muſt be rooted out; and the altars erected to it in the heart broke down. And then there muſt be a ſtrict and inviolable attachment to the word of God, a regard to every precept; taking the divine law as the rule of our own conduct, and yielding up all the powers of our ſouls to the ſacred and commanding influence of it. The word of God muſt be hid in the heart; this muſt be the guide of life, and the only rule of our behaviour. And then we are to regard this word of God as reaching the ſoul and inner man, as well as the meer external actions.

And laſtly, as ever we would ſeek God in earneſt, and find the bleſſing, we ſhould do it in a way of covenant engagement. This is what our Parents have done for us in early life; but we are not to be ſatisfied with their religion, but ſhould ſtand to the covenant of our Fathers, by taking on us the bonds of the covenant ourſelves, in that way which God has appointed. Thus, as under the Jewiſh diſpenſation, we find the people ‡ *entered into a covenant*

* 2 Chron. xxxiv. 30, 31. † Ver. 33. ‡ 2 Chron. xv. 12.

covenant to ſeek the Lord God of their Fathers, and to ſerve him with all their heart, and with all their ſoul; ſo we, under the goſpel, are to enter ourſelves publickly into covenant with God, as ſoon as we come to a capacity for it, through a Mediator, as ever we would obtain his favour in earneſt, and be ſteady in his ſervice to the end of life. But this brings me to the next thing.

To conſider the character here given of God, *as the God of* David *his Father*. You will eaſily perceive, that though David is here called the *Father of* JOSIAH, yet JOSIAH was not the next in deſcent from David, but at ſeveral removes diſtant. Though the line was continued, there had been a ſad interruption in the holineſs and piety of the intervening anceſtors; which began with the defection of Solomon, after all the care and inſtructions of David himſelf, and reached down to the Grandfather and Father of JOSIAH, Manaſſeh and Amon, who were notoriouſly wicked before the Lord; and others, though they had ſome good things in them, yet came far behind the piety of David, except Hezekiah; ſo that the hiſtorian ſeems on purpoſe to omit the mention of theſe, and fix the relation immediately to David as the moſt excellent anceſtor, and whoſe example this young Prince moſt nearly and exactly copied. And the expreſſion further intimates to us theſe things.

1. His particular knowledge of and acquaintance with the true God.

It was not a ſtrange an unknown God he ſought after, but one of whom he had often heard. It is probable that though Amon was wicked, yet the Mother of JOSIAH was one of piety and virtue, becauſe of the mention of her name alone

in the begining of his hiſtory in the book of Kings. And if this is allowed, according to ſome Commentators, then we may ſuppoſe that, by the care of his pious Mother, he was educated in the fear and knowledge of this God; and might be taught particularly to look to the eminent example of his anceſtor David. And then

2. This expreſſion further intimates the ſenſe which JOSIAH had of his obligations to God under that character.

He *began to ſeek after the God of* David *his Father*; that God, to whom he had been devoted, of whom he had ſo often heard, and in whoſe covenant he reckoned himſelf already engaged. Though ſome of the deſcendants of holy David had broke the covenant, yet he, by having the ſame honourable deſcent, reckoned himſelf obliged to act agreably: he conſidered that the example of his immediate Father and others would never bear him out, nor excuſe him, in a courſe of diſobedience and wickedneſs; but, on the contrary, that he ſhould reflect and determine to walk in the old path of holineſs and obedience, for which David was ſo conſpicuous, and from which others of his progenitors had ſadly turned aſide. Theſe conſiderations might affect his tender ſpirit, for which he is celebrated; and excite him at once to break through all oppoſition, and be ſteadily fixed in the cauſe of virtue: to think that this God looked down upon him, knew his original deſcent, and watched his conduct, and would deal with him in a ſeverer manner, if he broke through his engagements, as he had done with others; but, that if he was faithful and ſincere, would diſtinguiſh him with peculiar rewards. So that

3. The

3. The expreſſion may alſo intimate the peculiar advantages he had for ſeeking God, and the bleſſings he might hope for in the ſearch.

It was the *God of* David *his Father*; and he might hope, that ſurely God would remember his word unto David his ſervant, and regard thoſe with a ſpecial favour who deſcended from him, when they walked in the ſame way of holineſs with him. God, as an infinitely wiſe and good Being, is ready to be found of all the children of men whenever they ſeek him, yet the ſeed of his ſervants, the poſterity of a faithful Abraham, or a holy David, are peculiarly acceptable. From them he has juſtly larger expectations, on them he beſtows great advantages by early education, and convictions; and when theſe are complied with, the Father's God looks down with a ſacred pleaſure on the pious child, and marks the youthful religion with a diſtinguiſhing approbation. And, then, ſuch may hope for remarkable bleſſings. This, no doubt, the young perſon in our text had good reaſon to expect, that when he ſought after the God of his pious anceſtors with all his heart and ſoul, he that eminently appeared as the God of David in all his ſurprizing deliverances from dangers and evils, and that diſcovered ſo many mercies to him, would be the ſame to him alſo, if he walked in the ſame righteous ſteps; and eſpecially if, when others had turned aſide, and forgot their obligations, and broke through the bonds of a good education, and proved a diſgrace to a religious deſcent, he by a life of ſingular piety kept up the dignity and honour of it.

But this leads me to the next general.

II. To conſider the particular ſeaſon of life when JOSIAH thus diſtinguiſhed himſelf for God,

God, and the ſeveral circumſtances which rendered his virtue ſo amiable and conſpicuous.

The ſeaſon itſelf was remarkable. *It was in the eighth year of his Reign, when he was yet young.* If we compare this with the firſt verſe, we ſhall find that it was in the * *ſixteenth year of his age*, that he thus in earneſt began for God and religion, by *ſeeking after the God of his Father*. It was in early life; and in a very critical period of life too.

It was in early life; in the bloom of youth when he had but juſt entered upon his journey, as it were, taken but a little ſurvey of its proſpects, and might have pleaſed himſelf with many years to come, and therefore have madly † *rejoiced in the days of his youth, by walking in the ways of his heart, and in the ſight of his eyes:* he then, before he ventured far on the dangerous road, looked up to God, and fixed his hope, his ſupreme truſt and dependence on him. In ſo early a ſeaſon he might have diſmiſſed ſerious reflexions for a *more convenient time*, till he ſhould have grown grey in years, and been ſoured by a long experience of that old truth, ‡ *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*; and fancied that religion would marr all his joy, and was very unſuitable and ungraceful.

But, inſtead of this, he reckons his early piety his glory; and choſe at firſt to principle his mind in a right manner, as the only foundation for ſolid pleaſure now, and comfortable reviews hereafter; thus ſhewing, that as he was convinced, it was every one's duty to begin with God, ſo it was the moſt practicable and delightful conduct.

And then this choice and ſearch, as it was made while he was yet young, ſo was it in a very critical period of youth itſelf. At this age, the paſſi-

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* 2 Chron. xxxiv. 1, 3. † Eccleſ. xi. 9.
‡ Eccleſ. i. 2.

ons begin to play and exert themſelves in a ſtronger manner than ever they did before, the deſires and calls after ſenſual entertainments are very loud and importunate, and the voice of reaſon is ſo mild and gentle, that it is ſeldom heard to quell the mutiny, while the authority of parents and inſtructors is gradually leſſened; perſons about this ſeaſon being too wiſe to be governed, and yet, in fact, too ignorant to rule and govern themſelves. Then alſo temptations are very exactly ſuited; there are the ſnares of vice, and low gratifications of appetite, propoſed and offered in the ſtrongeſt manner; there are the proſpects of new and gay ſcenes continually ariſing from theſe and other indulgences, to delude and ſwell the fancy, and heat the ſoul; ſo that this is eminently a dangerous ſeaſon to youth, and ſo fatal, that not many eſcape a fall. How often at this turning period of life, do we behold the unhappy biaſs with the young of both kinds! One following the multitude of their aſſociates to do evil, and fulfil the deſires of the fleſhly mind, giving a looſe to every ſenſual turn; and the other, though they ſave their virtue, yet, giving up their hearts to unworthy objects, become proſelytes to vanity, to conſtant fluttering, and to an habitually thoughtleſs and giddy temper, that renders all advice, counſils, and ſerious admonitions too often uſeleſs and unſucceſsful. Now at this important ſeaſon, did JOSIAH act a ſingular and contrary part, and by a life of early piety oppoſe all the ſnares. When he was in the heat of youth, inſtead of laying down the reins, and leting the paſſions drive, he makes a ſolemn pauſe in life, curbs their fury, and brings them, by an early diſcipline, under a mild and eaſy government. At the ſeaſon when others break through reſtraint, and chuſe to reject all counſil, he puts himſelf under the divine guidance

dance, and crys unto God, "*My Father, thou* "*art the* choſen *guide of my youth!*" At a year when others became willing captives of every low pleaſure and vain delight, he raiſes his mind to God, and prefers the rational the divine pleaſures of religion, and ſubſtantial virtue.

And, then, let us conſider the particular circumſtances that attend JOSIAH, which render his early piety more amiable. What greater temptation than a Crown? However it may be deſpiſed by the old and infirm that are full of years, it muſt certainly ſparkle and glitter in a youthful eye; and be eſteemed a glorious ornament to that head, which had worn it but a few years, and hardly felt the cares of it. Ah, which of us would not have yielded to the powerful attraction; and, inſtead of looking to higher glories, confined all our views within that radiant circle? How difficult for a youthful heart not to be ſwelled with the honours of a Court, and its vanity not riſe in proportion to the flattery and dependence of an obſequious crowd? How pleaſing to the ambition of a Prince is the proſpect of a long reign, extended conqueſts, and increaſing victories! Say now, if the moſt aſpiring could ever graſp at more; or when acquired, would be ſolicitous of any thing further? Yet our example in the text ſets before us a lovely youth, in the eighth year of his Reign, when he juſt began to feel his dignity and honour, amidſt the ſplendors of a Crown, the inchantments of a Palace, and all the gay allurements, that could aſſault the heart of man, unbiaſſed, unmoved, and raiſed to God and religion, and unalterably fixed for ſtrict and perſevering virtue. What a character is here! Methinks, there ſhould be a holy emulation in every breaſt, and every young perſon ſhould ſay, "Why may "not I be like him in his virtue, tho' not in his "grandeur, and his temptations?" But

But then, the character will appear yet more illuſtrious, if we conſider the great difficulties he had to ſtruggle with, as a general reformer. To oppoſe the idolatry of the whole nation, and live down the bad example of his Fathers, to ſtrike at all the vicious prejudices of a corrupt age, and attempt the change of a nation, againſt all the deſigns of conſpirators, and without fear. Surely this ſhews at once invincible courage, and a ſpirit inlivened and quickened by that which can alone furniſh a man for ſuch work, and ſucceed him in it, and that is, by a ſpirit of true inward religion, and devotedneſs to God.

Thus have I conſidered, and recommended to you, this illuſtrious example. And all that now remains is to make ſome proper Application.

And though I might draw ſeveral uſeful inferences, yet I ſhall only mention two. One of which, as we are entered on the firſt day of a new year, ſhall reach back to our paſt years; and the other forward, as to this, and all, that a patient and long-ſuffering God ſhall yet think fit to meaſure out to us.

1. From what has been ſuggeſted, let us be excited to a ſerious reflexion on our paſt lives; and inquire what have been our purſuits, and the object of our diligent ſearch.

This may affect perſons in every age; but let the young think themſelves engaged in it too. Thoſe of you who are in the earlieſt part of life, that are capable of reaſon and underſtanding, can turn in upon yourſelves, and take a review of your conduct; and as you have not many years to trace back, can be more ready and particular in the inquiry. * *Be not then*, in the heat of youth, *as the horſe*

* Pſal. xxxii. 9.

horſe or the mule that have no underſtanding, with all the glorious rational furniture about you; but now look back and aſk your own hearts, what you have been doing. You are made * *wiſer than the beaſts of the field*, and have *more underſtanding than the fowls of heaven*; and for what was this diſtinction, if not for this, that you ſhould *ſeek after God your Maker?* Your infancy was bare exiſtence, your childhood, great part of it, ſlipped away before you were aware; and little or nothing remains, except the vanity of it. But then here is the queſtion, does the vanity increaſe with your riſing years? Or is there a cure begun by early religion? God has called at the firſt dawnings of reaſon, as ſoon as ever you were capable of chuſing the good, and refuſing the evil; and this has been his condeſcending expoſtulation, "† *Wilt thou not* "*from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art* "*the guide of my youth?* Thou art entering upon "a world full of troubles and difficulties, ſnares "and temptations, art inexperienced, and expo- "ſed to a thouſand dangers and wilt thou not "look to me, who am ready to be thy guide and al- "mighty friend?" And what has been thy anſwer? Was it this? "Lord, it is yet ſoon enough; let me "try a little my own ſtrength, and give up my "heart to every joy, and then I will come to "thee." Some of you, perhaps, ſtand here before God this day at the ſame age with the young perſon in my text, and with many of his advantages. You have had many pious anceſtors in former ages, and may have been happier in ſome reſpects, by having God the God of all your Fathers, without one ſinful breach in the line; and in this view you have been favoured with peculiar bleſſings. God hath been drawing you, not only with the common favours of his Providence, the preſer-

* Job xxxv. 11. † Jer. iii. 4.

preſervation in infancy and childhood, but with all the ſtronger motives of a pious education, and early inſtruction. *You have heard with your ears, and your Fathers have told you, what great things God has done for them,* and for you; and they have endeavoured to faſten the inſtruction. And have your hearts been tender, and eaſily ſuſceptible of good impreſſions? Or have you been careleſs and inattentive to all? Have you begun in earneſt to *ſeek after the God of your Fathers?* In this critical period given up yourſelves to him, and ſtood to the ſolemn engagements like children of the covenant? Or does not this youthful ſeaſon, and this returning year as well as others, witneſs to your conſtant neglect of theſe things; and to your reſigning your hearts to vanity and trifles, to low and unworthy objects, without attending to his calls and entreaties?

And then inquire further, for what are you come here this day? Is it only to hear an addreſs to the young, and go away and reſolve to adjourn the ſerious compliance to the next year; or to begin now without any longer delay?

Be perſuaded to admit ſuch reflexions, and to judge of yourſelves accordingly. And if you have ground to conclude againſt yourſelves that you have never yet begun to live to any valuable purpoſe, let your * *repentings be kindled within you*; and *conſider theſe things, and ſhew yourſelves men, O ye tranſgreſſors!*

And as for thoſe who are further advanced in life, and yet have never regarded God, it is ſurely high time for them to make a pauſe, and reflect upon their thoughtleſs conduct. What a ſhocking thought, for a reaſonable Being to have lived upon divine Providence, received conſtant and unnumbered bleſſings from his bountiful hand, for forty or fifty years together, and never ſolemnly

* Iſa. xlviii. 8.

ſought after God, nor in a becoming manner confeſſed its obligations! That, while * *the ox knows his owner, and the aſs his maſter's crib*, you have gone through life, enjoyed every † *year crowned with the divine goodneſs*, and yet have never been perſuaded by ‡ *theſe mercies to yield yourſelves to God*; but remain this day, as in all before, ſtupid, thoughtleſs, and ungrateful. O that the recollection might now fill you with ſhame, that ſo you may mourn for the ſins of your youth, and turn unto God without delay!

2. Let all who are in early life be perſuaded now, from this day, to ſeek after God in earneſt.

This day is the bleſſed invitation renewed to you, while thouſands are cut off before the return of it. ‖ *Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.* § *Now is the accepted time, now is the day of ſalvation.* O let it be the *acceptable year of the Lord to you!* ¶ *Men and brethren*, my young friends, *children of the ſtock of Abraham, ſuffer the word of exhortation, for to you is the word of ſalvation ſent.* Do not reject the advice, do not put off the compliance, when §§ *you know not what a day may bring forth*, much leſs a year. You are no doubt laying ſchemes for this world, and promiſing yourſelves many years to come; but I wiſh, that, inſtead of fixing all your views to time, you would now begin for God, and make this promiſe before you leave this aſſembly. "I will now this "day begin *to ſeek the Lord God of my Fathers*," and practice the reſolution. Come then, one and all of us, let us enter into this bleſſed combination, this happy agreement; and let us all, with one

* Iſa. i. 3. † Pſa. lxv. 11. ‡ Rom. xii. 1.
‖ Iſa. lv. 6. § 2 Cor. vi. 2. ¶ Acts xiii. 26.
§§ Prov. xxvii. 1.

one heart and one voice, turn unto the moſt High. " O Lord God of nature, and infinite " goodneſs, who changeſt the times and the ſea- " ſons and haſt lengthened out my years, through " whoſe help I continue to this day, I now in " the ſeaſon of my choice come to thee, to pre- " ſent myſelf to thee, as my moſt reaſonable ſer- " vice! Thou art my God, and I will praiſe thee, " by devoting my life, and all my remaining " years to thy ſervice; thou art my Father's God, " and therefore I will exalt thee, and take a pe- " culiar pleaſure in ſeeking thee under this cha- " racter, *for thou never ſaidſt to the ſeed of Jacob,* " *ſeek ye my face in vain.* Be but my God and " guide through life, accept my ſelf-dedication, " and give me grace here, and glory hereafter, " and I deſire no more."

We may be aſſured if we enter on life, and begin the world, without God, we can have no ſolid ground to hope for his bleſſing; but may dread a curſe, and a diſappointment in our moſt pleaſing expectations, as well as provoke him to cut ſhort our years in vengeance. But if we conſecrate our early days to his ſervice, we may hope for his direction in every ſtep; and that he will *give us* all the lawful *deſires of our hearts*, as to this world, if they are but firſt yielded up to him upon this claim, *My Son, give me thy heart.*

SERMON III.

The Reaſonableneſs and Advantage of attending to the Counſils of religious Parents.

PROVERBS VI. 20, 21, 22.

My Son, keep thy Father's Commandment, and forſake not the Law of thy Mother.

Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.

When thou goeſt, it ſhall lead thee; when thou ſleepeſt, it ſhall keep thee; and when thou awakeſt, it ſhall talk with thee.

IN whatſoever view we conſider theſe words, whether as SOLOMON's repetition of his pious Father *David's* advice to him in the days of his youth; or his own exhortation to his Son in early life; or laſtly, as the counſil and direction of eternal Wiſdom to all young perſons in every age, they are ſuited to convey the moſt uſeful and ſeaſonable inſtruction to our minds. If we attend to them, as the repetition of his Father's inſtruction to SOLOMON himſelf, when young, they diſcover to us the ſenſe he had of the kindneſs, as well as wiſdom and reaſonableneſs of the injunction. If we conſider them as his advice

vice to his own Son, they ſhow the care he took of his education, and the concern which he had for his trueſt happineſs in future life. And if we regard them eminently, as the command of Jehovah the true God, (the Father of all rational Beings, and in much condeſcention ſtiled * *The God of the ſpirits of all fleſh*) to the young in general when they are entering on life, in order to eſtabliſh them for ſerious conſideration, and to prevent their being intangled in the ſnares of the world, we muſt reverence them ſo much the more, and acknowledge our increaſing obligation to attention and obedience.

It does not, I own, appear improper or forced, to me, to include the whole in the words of my text; and read them, as they expreſs the advice of SOLOMON to his own Son, which he recollected he had received from his Father, and could not but approve; and which, under the particular direction of the Spirit of God, he injoined the obſervance of on him; and recommended to all young perſons in every age, as far as the nature and reaſon of the thing would hold.

So that I ſhall conſider the words in this full and comprehenſive ſenſe, as pointing out to us,

The Reaſonableneſs and Advantage of attending to and following the Counſils and Inſtructions of wiſe and religious Parents.

Accordingly I ſhall premiſe one or two things for ſtating this doctrine, and then proceed to a more diſtinct enlargement on ſo uſeful a ſubject. *My Son, keep thy Father's Commandment, and forſake not the Law of thy Mother*, &c. Now to be ſure it is here preſuppoſed,

1. That this Law and Commandment be in itſelf fit and right.

* Numb. xxvii. 16

By fit and right I mean ſuch as is agreable to thoſe different relations of Parents and Children, which it is not improper for the one to injoin, nor for the other to yield to and obey. I mention this, becauſe it is a very ſuppoſeable caſe that the Laws and Commandments of Parents may ſometimes happen to be contrary to this rule; and in fact have been ſo. The *Fathers of our fleſh are men of like paſſions with ourſelves*; and may be ſo far under the influence of theſe paſſions, that, according to the Apoſtle's ſuppoſition, * *they may often correct their children only after their own pleaſure*; and therefore they may command ſome things, only for the gratification of a falſe humour and paſſion, which may upon the whole be contrary to reaſon, and truth, and righteouſneſs; and which, if yielded to, would involve them and their children too in iniquity and guilt. To ſuch Laws as theſe does not the wiſdom of SOLOMON, much leſs the eternal wiſdom of God, require reverence and obedience. The commands to vice, irreligion, and wickedneſs, to force conſcience, and violate the ſtrong the ſacred engagements to God and virtue, to which ſome unhappy Parents have required an obedience, inſtead of being yielded to, muſt be rejected with a ſubmiſſive diſlike and averſion; becauſe they are contrary to the original law of God, the Creator of all, who is their proper Father; and to that commandment of love, reverence, and obedience to him, which is written in their heart, and is to be the unalterable ſtandard and rule of their conduct. And then,

2. It ſeems here further preſuppoſed, that theſe Laws and Commandments, to which SOLOMON refers, are not only ſuch as are in the general

* Heb. xii. 10.

general right in themſelves, but ſuch as more immediately regard the practice of true religion and virtue; in oppoſition to a neglect of God and piety on the one hand, and the complying with the ſnares of vice and debauchery on the other.

To this the verſes both before and after my text ſeem principally to lead us. Not as if the command to a decent and becoming cariage was to be neglected; but as wiſdom, or * true religion, is the principal thing, ſo young perſons were moſt attentively to regard the exhortations to that, and from the rules of that form their conduct in common life. In the verſes before my text, from the 12th to the 20th, the † wiſe man had, in a very beautiful manner, been drawing the character of a naughty and wicked man, and then points out the miſerable end and ruin of ſuch an one; after this he reckons particularly ‡ *ſix things, yea* even *ſeven which are* eminently *an abomination* to a God of truth, righteouſneſs, and goodneſs; and then adds "*My Son, keep thy Father's Commandment,* "*and forſake not the Law of thy Mother*; when, by "their counſil and inſtruction, they caution thee "againſt ſuch a behaviour as will ſo notoriouſly "offend God, and expoſe thee to his diſpleaſure "and wrath." ‖ And in the verſes immediately after my text SOLOMON renews his exhortations and entreaties to the young, to ſhun the ſnares of the harlot and adultereſs, and to fortify themſelves againſt the temptations to vice and uncleanneſs. Theſe things being premiſed, I now proceed to the diſtinct conſideration of the words in the following manner.

I. To

* Prov. iv. 7. † Ver. 12, &c. ‡ Ver. 16 and 19. ‖ Ver. 24, &c.

I. To inquire a little into the nature and extent of this duty here recommended. And then,

II. To point out the reaſonableneſs and advantage of complying with it.

I. Let us conſider a little the nature and extent of this duty required.

It is to keep the Law and Commandments of our religious Parents, and never forſake them, by turning aſide into any practiee that is contrary thereto. But the wiſe man expreſſes himſelf in a ſtronger and more beautiful manner, in the ſecond verſe of our text, *Bind them continually on thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.* It is not improbable, that SOLOMON may here allude to the direction of God by Moſes to the Iſraelites, concerning their regard to his law, as we read in *Deuteronomy*; * *Ye ſhall lay up theſe my words in your heart, and in your ſoul, and bind them for a ſign upon your hands, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes.* A like expreſſion of SOLOMON we have in other places in the book of *Proverbs.* Thus, † *My Son, forget not my Law; but let thine heart keep my Commandments. Bind them about thy neck, write them on the table of thine heart.* And again, ‡ *My Son, hear the Inſtruction of thy Father, and forſake not the Law of thy Mother; for they ſhall be an ornament of grace unto thine head, and as a chain about thy neck.* From that original direction to the Iſraelites, the Jews have made it a cuſtom to write part of their Law on pieces of parchment, and wear them conſtantly about them. But the manner of the expreſſion ſeems rather deſigned to repreſent

* Deut. xi. 18. † Prov. iii. 1, 3. ‡ Chap. i. 8, 9.

repreſent the neceſſity of a ſtrict, inward, and never-failing regard to theſe Laws and Commandments; and preſerving them as their chief treaſure, and as that which will be of the greateſt advantage to them. So that the following things ſeem to take in the full ſenſe of the duty injoyned in the text. 1. That the young ſhould receive the pious Inſtructions and Commands of their Parents with readineſs and pleaſure. 2. That they ſhould treaſure them up in their minds, as what are certainly of great importance to them. And, 3. That they act under the conſtant habitual influence of them.

1. The duty which SOLOMON exhorts the young in the words of my text implies, as the foundation of it, that they attend to and receive the Laws and Commands of their religious Parents with readineſs and pleaſure.

This the mention of the heart, and binding them there, imports. For wherever the heart is fixed, there the will, the deſires, the hopes, the wiſhes center; and the pleaſure and delight is in proportion to the obtaining the fulfilment of theſe wiſhes and deſires. It ſeems therefore highly requiſite, that the heart and affections ſhould be engaged here, in order to fix the good impreſſion on the ſoul, and direct the conduct. There muſt be a love to the Command and the Law itſelf, as well as to the perſons that injoin it, in order to render the obedience to it eaſy and delightful.

This love and affection is to ariſe from a conviction of the propriety of the obedience; which conviction will, the more ſtrongly it is perceived, direct the heart and fix it, ſo as that it ſhall never wander. God therefore himſelf, when he would engage the young in earneſt to piety and devotion,

and

and SOLOMON under his direction, calls, * *My Son, give me thine heart; and*, then it follows, *let thine eyes obſerve my ways.* And in other places, † *Apply thine heart to inſtruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.* And thus the *wiſe man* tells us that his Father *David* urged, ‡ *He taught me alſo, and ſaid unto me, let thine heart retain my words; keep my Commandments and live.*

Now what do theſe exhortations to the heart of man intimate, but the neceſſity of engaging that, and the paſſions and affections of the mind, ſtrongly on this ſide? And unleſs this point is gained, we ſhall make nothing of it in religion; the young will ſtill be giddy, thoughtleſs, and inattentive. Notwithſtanding the appearance of regard and outward reverence, yet, the affections being diverted, or fixed on another object, all will be loſt, or to no purpoſe. It is highly expedient and proper therefore, that the maſter-paſſions, the leading inclinations, ſhould be firſt brought over, ſo that the whole man may be in a proper diſpoſition to receive the benefit and advantage of ſuch Inſtructions and Commands.

2. It is further implied, in the text, that the young treaſure up in their minds the good Inſtructions of their Parents, as what may be of the greateſt ſervice and importance to them.

Bind them continually on thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. "Keep them as a treaſure, and "wear them as an ornament." And this is the natural conſequence of having the heart, that is, the affections and paſſions, fixed on them; for where they are once engaged, the mind will naturally dwell upon the object, and never loſe ſight of

* Prov. xxiii. 26. † Ver. 12. ‡ Chap. iv. 4.

of it. It is not enough for young perſons to give their Parents the hearing, in a looſe careleſs or curſory manner, but they are to hearken, to receive the truth in the love of it; and weigh what is propoſed with deliberation, and by the ballance of reaſon, and unprejudiced underſtanding. Thus, as the expreſſion is in another place, they are to * *incline their ear, and* then *hearken diligently*; and ſo not loſe the force of the inſtruction through forgetfulneſs, and a vain wandering unſettled ſpirit afterwards, much leſs diſmiſs it at once, without regarding the nature and import of it; but it is to be the ſubject of frequent ſerious meditation, and the moſt cool ſedate reflexion. The advice of ſiners muſt be rejected, the counſil of the ungodly ſhuned, and the ways of tranſgreſſors avoided with watchfulneſs and diſlike; but theſe wiſe and righteous rules and dictates are to be received, as what they highly eſteem, and the obſervance of which, in their lives and converſations, they are perſuaded will be their greateſt honour and beſt recommendation both to God and man. But this runs me unavoidably into the other heads; and therefore,

3. The expreſſion in my text further intimates, that the young act in life under the conſtant influence of theſe religious Laws and Commands of their Parents.

For this, and this only, is obedience; it conſiſts not merely in hearing and talking, but in living. And this is the only way by which we can poſſibly ſhew that we have received their inſtructions into the heart, and given the due and proper attention to them, by ſuffering them to direct

* Iſa. lv 3.

rect our whole conduct; becauſe they are rules of life, and not of empty ſpeculation.

It is expected then, that they learn hereby betimes to perform their regards to God, to reverence his name, adore his perfections, and pay him devout and ſtated acknowledgments and worſhip; that they learn to govern themſelves and to guard againſt thoſe particular ſnares and temptations, of which they have been moſt ſtrongly cautioned, and which they have heard are moſt likely to entangle and prove fatal to them.

And it is further intimated under this head, that the young not only act according to theſe directions in the firſt part of early life, and when they are children, but that as they grow up, when they come to thoſe years that free them generally from the fear of bodily correction, and when they go from under the immediate parental care to ſerve in other families, that then they recollect their advice and counſils; and from the treaſury of them lodged in the heart, derive proper inſtructions for the conduct of their lives. And ſtill further does it ſeem implied here, that if, even at ſuch a growing age, the kind and wiſe Father, and the tender and prudent Mother ſhould, at particular ſeaſons, think proper to renew their exhortations, to talk over the injunctions they gave them when children, and urge their continued regards to and practice of them, as what they apprehend of the greateſt uſe and importance to their beſt intereſts, the young man, inſtead of thinking himſelf above ſuch directions, inſtead of *walking in the ways of his own heart, and in the ſight of his eyes*, ſhould ſtill go on walking according to this rule; that he ſhould ſtill *keep the Commandment of his Father*, when he repeats thoſe awful words, * *Know thou, my Son, the God of thy Father,*

* 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

Father, and ſerve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; and that he ſhould *not forſake the Law of his Mother.*

The wiſe man here mentions *the Law of the Mother* particularly, not as diſtinct from, and much leſs oppoſite to the Father's Commands, (becauſe pious Parents agree in their injunctions, and the authority of the one, inſtead of thwarting ſupports that of the other) but perhaps, becauſe young perſons are more apt to abate their regards to their Mother as they grow up, and treat her with leſs deference and reſpect than the Father, on whom they imagine themſelves, as to this world, chiefly dependent. Now in oppoſition to ſuch a behaviour, it is particularly enjoined, *and forſake not the Law of thy Mother.* "Inſtead of throwing "off your regards to her, and thinking it be- "neath a perſon of your increaſing years to be "directed by a Mother, let her precepts have the "ſame weight as before; *and forſake not the "Law of her mouth*, though it be uttered with a "feeble voice, and under the diſadvantages of "age and growing infirmities." This SOLOMON expreſſeth in a ſtronger manner in another place; * *Hearken unto thy Father, and deſpiſe not thy Mother when ſhe is old.* And this, he tells us, was the advice which his Parents gave to him, and to ſhow his regard to both of them, by a continued growing obedience in proportion to his increaſing years; † *I was my Father's Son, tender and only beloved in the ſight of my Mother. He taught me alſo, and ſaid unto me, Let thine heart retain my Words; keep my Commandments, and live.* And he begins the laſt chapter of *Proverbs*, by writing down the inſtructions which his Mother had given him to direct his conduct. ‡ *The words of King Lemuel,*

* Prov. xxiii. 22. † Chap. iv. 3, 4. ‡ Chap. xxxi. 1.

Lemuel, the prophecy that his Mother taught him. Theſe things then ſeem to be implied in the duty recommended.

II. Let us conſider the reaſonableſs and advantage of complying with it.

The reaſonableneſs of complying with it will appear from theſe very obvious conſiderations.

1. From the relations themſelves.

It is not the Law and Command of a ſtranger, but it is the *Command of thy Father, and the Law of thy Mother* that bore thee. Now this conſideration intimates at once their ſpecial right and authority; and their peculiar tenderneſs and affection.

All Laws and Commands derive their force and obligation from the right and authority which the perſon, who makes them, has to injoin an obſervance of and obedience to them. This right is either natural, or acquired; *i. e.* obtained by the voluntary conſent and agreement of ſome perſons to be ſubject to others. God, the infinite and eternal Being, the author of all beings, and the creator of the univerſe, has a natural right in all creatures; and it is therefore infinitely fit and proper for him to preſcribe laws for the direction and government of his reaſonable creatures, and command their obſervance and obedience. And this right of his is prior to all others, nor to be equalled by any claims that come in competition with it; it is abſolute, unalienable, and uncontrolable.

Next to the natural right of the great Father of ſpirits, is that of the Parents of our fleſh, to whom we owe, as to this bodily life, under God, our being; and on whom we depend, as the inſtruments

ments of divine Providence, for our ſubſiſtence and comfort. Now their right over us is, in a proper ſenſe, natural; and therefore our obedience to their authority and commands (when it does not come in competition with the authority of the great Lord of all, from whom they receive their power, but rather tends to urge and inforce that) is certainly to be regarded as fit and reaſonable.

But then, there is not only the natural right and authority, but the remarkable affection of the Parents, to ſhow the reaſonableneſs of this attention and obedience. It is the Command of thy Father, of a perſon that wears the moſt endearing name and title; of a perſon who, while he is ſuppoſed to lay a proper claim to thy regard and reverence, can never (while he acts in character) be imagined to act without the tendereſt concern for the true welfare and happineſs of thoſe whom he addreſſes. Nature, and what we call inſtinct, directs the beaſts of the field, and the birds of the air, to cheriſh and provide for their offspring, and to defend them, as much as they can in apparent danger, before they can properly ſubſiſt of themſelves; and ſurely then it is to be taken for granted, that reaſonable beings, as their natural affection and regard is ſtronger and more abiding, would be more eminently ſolicitous for the welfare and happineſs of their deſcendents; and that in the whole of their conduct towards them, their chief deſire and principal concern would be for their beſt intereſts. And what can poſſibly more tend to promote theſe than the exhortations to piety and virtue; the commands to fear God and obey him, to love and reverence him, and to devote themſelves to him, and thus to evidence their wiſdom and underſtanding? Here eminently the intereſt of the Parent and the Child

is one and the ſame; and therefore, the more ſtrongly ſolicitous the Parent is for its own true and everlaſting felicity, the more its wiſhes and deſires exert themſelves for the promoting the ſame happineſs for the offspring.

Whenever therefore a pious Father, or a devout Mother, ſhall think proper to call upon you to the more diligent attention to matters of religion and virtue, and ſhall, with an air of gentle authority, demand your regard and obedience, liſten to them, as commanding that, which is not only reaſonable and fit in itſelf, but which, they are perſuaded, is for your ſupreme felicity; and ſo liſten to the voice of the kindeſt Friend, as well as the beſt Parent. "*My Son, keep thy Father's* "*Commandment, and forſake not the Law of thy Mo-*"*ther.* I call upon you by that name, which "at once beſpeaks my right in you, and my "fondeſt paſſion for you; *my heart is turned within* "*me, and my bowels move at the ſound.* My Son, "in you my hopes are ſtrongly placed as to fu-"ture life, and you I have eminently devoted to "God; and from you therefore I claim, as well "as expect, all that comfort and ſatisfaction "that can ariſe to a pious Parent from beholding "his children walk in the ways of truth and "righteouſneſs."

In this moſt tender and delicate manner is the Mother of *Lemuel*, or SOLOMON, repreſented as ſpeaking, when ſhe would with the authority of a Parent inculcate the principles of religion and virtue upon him. In that fore-cited chapter ſhe begins in theſe affectionate and ſtriking words, * *What, my Son? And what, the Son of my womb? And what, the Son of my vows?* "Theſe weigh-"ty ſentences (ſays a judicious Paraphraſt, † referring to the former verſe) "his Mother taught "him

* Prov. xxxi. 2. † Bp. *Patrick*'s Paraphraſe.

" him with ſuch authority as if ſhe had been a " Propheteſs, and with no leſs tenderneſs and af- " fection; ſaying, hearken, my dear Son, for " whoſe well-doing, O how much am I con- " cerned! I want words to expreſs the care I " have for your welfare and happineſs. What " ſhall I deſire thee to do for my ſake, who en- " dured ſo much with, and for thee? What ſhall " I pray and entreat thee to do for my ſake, for " whom I have made ſo many prayers to God, " and ſolemn vows too, if I might but ſee thee " come ſafe into the world, and grow up to " maturity?"

Does not then reaſon direct the attention of the young to ſuch Laws and advice as this? Muſt you not be fully convinced, that the matter of the counſil and advice is nothing but what your true unprejudiced underſtanding approves, and which you ought to regard? And muſt not gratitude urge you to attend to thoſe who are the inſtruments of your being, when they addreſs you with all the bowels of their tendereſt affection? And muſt you not reckon yourſelves under the ſtrongeſt obligations to yield, and ſubmit to their authority and injunctions, when they exerciſe that right which God and nature have from the firſt given them over you, for no other end than to engage you, in the ſtrongeſt manner poſſible, to purſue your own trueſt intereſt and happineſs? And then,

2. This reaſonableneſs and propriety of complying with the duty recommended in my text will further appear, if you conſider that they are the Laws and Commands of God, as well as of your Parents.

They are not only what are right and fit in themſelves, but they are backed and ſupported with the higheſt authority; and come recommended from your Parents as the will of the great Lord of all, the Being of infinite wiſdom, and unerring underſtanding.

And what can be more reaſonable than that you ſhould obey God, the ſovereign Lord and Ruler of the univerſe, who is your Creator and Preſerver and bountiful Benefactor? Him, whom if you do not willingly and by conſent yield to and obey now, you muſt be ſubject to hereafter, whether you will or not? Beſides, is it not moſt reaſonable that you ſhould obſerve his Laws, which are founded in the fitneſs of things, which are moſt accommodated to your nature and circumſtances, and the obſervance of which, in the very nature of the thing, will qualify you for the trueſt felicity? And when theſe Laws of God, which are the rules of religion and virtue, are recommended to you by your earthly Parents and Inſtructors, by thoſe who you are moſt ſenſibly perſuaded muſt conſult your trueſt intereſt, is it not the moſt fit and proper thing in all the world, that you ſhould *give the moſt diligent heed to theſe things, leaſt you let them ſlip*; that you ſhould lay them up in your hearts, and practiſe them in your lives?

And muſt not your neglecting and forſaking them be attended with the moſt bitter reflexions, and have the moſt unhappy concluſion? It will at laſt appear that, inſtead of acting the wiſe part by ſuch neglect, you have been acting moſt unjuſtly to yourſelves; offering the greateſt violence to your own intereſt, and coveting miſery and deſtruction. For * *he that ſinneth againſt me* (ſays *divine Wiſdom* by the mouth of this wiſe Father) *wrongeth his own ſoul; and all they that hate me*

* Prov. viii. 26.

me love death. Be convinced then from hence of the reaſonableneſs of complying with this duty. And † *hear me now, therefore,* (now this new year's day) *O ye children, and depart not from the words of my mouth; leaſt ye mourn at the laſt, when your fleſh and your bodies are conſumed, and ſay, how have we hated inſtruction, and our hearts deſpiſed reproof! And have not obeyed the voice of our teachers, nor inclined our ears to thoſe that inſtructed us!* But if yet you are not fully perſuaded by the conſideration of the reaſonableneſs of complying with this duty, attend a little

2. To the advantages that will ariſe from thus receiving and treaſuring up theſe religious inſtructions of your Parents.

Theſe are intimated in the laſt verſe of my text, *when thou goeſt, it ſhall lead thee; when thou ſleepeſt, it ſhall keep thee; and when thou awakeſt, it ſhall talk with thee.* The Jews were commanded by God to be very diligent and frequent in inculcating the precepts of the *divine Law* upon their children, as we read in the book of *Deuteronomy.* ‡ *The words which I command thee,* (the Parent and Inſtructor) *this day, ſhall be in thine heart; and thou ſhalt teach them diligently unto thy children,* (ſhalt inculcate and rivet them upon them) *when thou ſitteſt in thine houſe, and when thou walkeſt by the way, and when thou lieſt down, and when thou riſeſt up.* They were to be conſtant and diligent in their inſtructions, and to watch ſome ſpecial opportunities for enforcing them; as when they were ſiting with their families in free converſe, when they were walking with them in ſolitude, and free from the hurries of buſineſs, when they were together in the evening,

† Prov. v. 7, 11, 12, 13. ‡ Deut. vi. 6, 7.

ing, before they committed themſelves to reſt, and when they aroſe, and were about to enter on the buſineſs of the day; that ſo they might be guarded and fortified againſt the temptations of every ſeaſon of life. I cannot help imagining that SOLOMON, in my text, might allude to this original direction; and repreſent the advantages ariſing from obſerving thoſe religious inſtructions to be as great and conſtant, as the inculcating of them, was frequent, ſerious, and diligent. *When thou goeſt, it ſhall lead thee; when thou ſleepeſt, it ſhall keep thee; when thou awakeſt, it ſhall talk with thee.* Let us juſt mention two or three things particularly on each of theſe, and then haſten to an application.

One great advantage of attending to the Laws and Inſtructions of our religious Parents is this, *When thou goeſt, it ſhall lead thee.* What can be more ſeaſonable and beneficial to a traveller in a doubtful path, amidſt dangerous roads and enemies, and ſometimes in the dark, than a guide and a light? Why ſuch a traveller is the young man entering on life; ignorant in a great meaſure, and unexperienced himſelf, he ſees many roads before him, is expoſed to many who are laying ſnares and temptations for him, and is often likely to be bewildered, and not ſee his way. Now in ſuch a journey as this, * *the Commandment* (as SOLOMON elegantly ſays) *is a lamp*; and the hand of a wiſe religious Parent holds it out to the attentive obedient youth, to guide him in the right path, to ſhew him his danger and enemies on each ſide of him, to direct him in his various buſineſſes, undertakings and employments, in all his future ſettlements, ſo as to ſecure his virtue and peace; and to help him over thoſe difficulties, which would otherwiſe be too

* Prov. vi. 23.

too hard and inſuperable. And who would not be glad of ſuch a conductor as this? Who can be unwilling to comply with the advice in my text, when he conſiders that this is the faithful promiſe to ſuch, *when thou goeſt it ſhall lead thee?*

Again, here is another benefit and advantage, *when thou ſleepeſt it ſhall keep thee.* And what can afford greater ſatisfaction to the mind than this, the beſt proſpect of ſecurity in the moſt unguarded hours? It was a frequent practice among ſuperſtitious people to make uſe of amulets or charms, which were hung about the necks of children, to keep off evil, and prevent danger. Now (ſays a learned Commentator) "if "this ſuperſtitious cuſtom was practiſed in the "eaſtern nations ſo early as SOLOMON's time, it "is not improbable but that he might allude "to it in this paſſage," (not that he would recommend writing words of the Law on ſcraps of paper, and tying them in the room of thoſe charms, but) to intimate, that a conſtant affectionate remembrance and obſervance of that Law, eſpecially as inculcated by Parents, would eminently recommend them to God, who alone giveth the comfortable refreſhing ſleep, and makes them dwell in ſafety; and put them under the charge of his ſpecial kind Providence. For *as the Commandment is a lamp*, ſo *the Law is a light*; and by obſerving that, the *darkneſs ſhall* (as it were) *be light about them.*

I confeſs, indeed, under the goſpel this is not always the conſequence of ſuch obedience; becauſe we have inſtances of ſuch conſcientious obedient perſons not only expoſed to dangers, but actually ſuffering by midnight flames and ſons of violence, as well as by other calamities. But, ſtill, their acting agreably to the divine Commands is the moſt likely way to ſecure the divine pro-

protection, and affords the only ſolid reaſon and ground for truſt in the ſecurity of Providence; and therefore always will obtain it, when it is beſt for them, or make all the diſappointments and troubles they meet with *work together for their good.* The wicked and diſobedient are repreſented * *like the troubled ſea that cannot reſt*; their follies and iniquities often terrify their ſlumbers, and *ſcare them through night viſions*; or their eyes are held waking through the dread of being overtaken with juſtice. While the truly religious and obedient, thoſe who follow the counſil of their pious Parents, and of divine wiſdom, can cloſe their eyes without any uneaſy reflections. † *Whoſo hearkeneth unto me ſhall dwell ſafely, and ſhall be quiet from fear of evil.*

Laſtly, the other advantage of ſuch obedience is this, *when thou awakeſt it ſhall talk with thee.* "If thine eyes are held waking in the night "at any time, the meditating on this Law, and "thy obſervance of it, ſhall adminiſter counſil "and comfort to thee. It ſhall refreſh thy ſpi-"rits with the thoughts of thy having eſcaped "the ſnares and pollutions of the world, and ob-"tained the divine approbation; ſo that thou "ſhalt, as it were, in the ſilent watches of the "night, hear the ſecret whiſpers of the divine "goodneſs and love, like the kind talking of "thy Parents to thee, for thine encouragement "in the progreſs of virtue; and ſhalt have the "promiſes of the everlaſting rewards ſuggeſted "as a ſtrong conſolation. Or *when thou awak-"eſt* in the morning, after the comfortable re-"freſhment of the night, by laying up this Law "in thine heart, and conſtantly obſerving it, thy "firſt thoughts will naturally run upon it; and "by ſerious meditation thou wilt have thoſe "ſug-

* Iſa. lvii. 20. † Prov. i. 33.

" ſuggeſtions to thy mind with regard to thy " conduct and behaviour, as ſhall keep *thy heart* " from *envying ſinners*, and preſerve *thee in the fear* " *of the Lord all the day long*, both at home and " abroad." And ſo the *reproofs of inſtruction*, if admitted, will be found to be *the way of life*.

Thus have I conſidered the duty recommended, and proved the reaſonableneſs and advantage of complying with it. And if we lay the whole together, I hope we ſhall not be able to reſiſt the force of it. All that remains then is to cloſe my diſcourſe with a ſhort but ſerious Application.

And though my ſubject leads me eminently to the young, yet as there is ſomething all along ſuppoſed with reference to Parents, I hope I ſhall be excuſed if I begin with an addreſs to them.

To you then, who are Parents, and are ſo happy as to have your children preſerved to you, to you I addreſs myſelf, and beg you would ſuffer the word of exhortation. You are all ſenſible of the authority you have over your children, and are often ready to inculcate on them the duty of obedience; but give me leave to ſay, unleſs you are obedient to the Law of the great God, the almighty Father of ſpirits yourſelves, unleſs you practice true religion, and feel the power of it, you can have but little true hope of the ſucceſs of your injunctions on your children. And indeed, how can you expect that they ſhould pay a proper regard to you, if you *live without God in the world?* If you never own him as the founder of your family, by morning and evening prayer, (throughout a whole year) can you reaſonably expect that your child ſhould, as it grows up, be always ſenſible of its infinitely leſſer dependence on you, and acknowledge, in little ways, its gratitude? If your houſes are generally the reſort of the looſe and profane, the deriders of ſe-

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rious practical religion, can you wonder if your children, as they grow up, keep bad company too? Alas, how otherwiſe ſhall they be fit company for their Parents! Or if the *Commandment of the Father* is only this, "My child, follow my "example; try to grow rich, and make your "fortune in the world; money is the principal "thing, therefore with all your gettings get "that, my Son, and do not be over-ſcrupulous "how." And if the *Law of the Mother* is only this, "Study the ornaments of the body, the "arts of converſation and trifling, and take care "of being too ſtiff and formal in matters of reli-"gion; nor dare to mention it in polite compa-"ny." If theſe are only the Laws which (tho' not poſitively enjoined yet) are authoriſed by the example of one or both Parents, can they wonder if their children, in their turn, ſhould go beyond even their meaſures, and grow more ridiculous than themſelves?

Be perſuaded then, as you would ſhow your true love to your offspring, principally to regard them as reaſonable immortal beings, capable of eternal happineſs. And that you may with a good grace addreſs them under that character, ſee that you are ſincerely devoted to God yourſelves; for if you ſhould be well-wiſhers to religion, and deſire to ſee them truly good, yet, if you have not ſolemnly devoted your ownſelves to the Lord, your exhortations will be cold and lifeleſs to them; you will bluſh ſadly, if they ſhould aſk you about a Sacrament, and your very prayers muſt be hindered with them, if not reſtrained, when you know that you are not thoroughly in earneſt in your own hearts. Be careful then, that you not only ſpeak for God to them, but that your authority is enforced by your example. And then ſee that the rules of religion you preſcribe are

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from the word of God, and not the ſchemes and inventions of men. Teach your children betimes to *know the holy Scriptures*, and chiefly to regard them as **able to make them wiſe unto ſalvation, through faith which is in Chriſt Jeſus.*

And now let me cloſe with an addreſs to the deſcendants of religious Parents themſelves. To them let me repeat the words of my text, and deſire them to attend, not as to my words, but to the direction of infinite wiſdom. *My Son, keep thy Father's Commandment, and forſake not the Law of thy Mother; bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck.* Regard their exhortations to fear God, to work righteouſneſs, to avoid the ſnares of vice, and the pollutions in the world, to watch your own conduct, and govern yourſelves by the beſt rules, ſo as that you may obtain the favour of God and man too. Conſider that the things which your Parents and wiſe Inſtructors require of you are not matters of indifference, but ſuch wherein your life and happineſs, and eternal ſalvation are moſt nearly concerned; and without the due and perſevering obſervance of which you muſt be for ever miſerable. If then you have never ſeriouſly attended before, let me in God's name, in the name of your Parents, whoſe advocate I now am, and in that endearing name of your own intereſt, beſeech you, that from henceforward you hear and obey. How can you better begin a new year, than by entering on it with a reſolution for God, and goodneſs, and attending to the counſils of your friends, when they call upon you once more, *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth?*

Conſider how much comfort you loſe, while you neglect this obſervance. Conſider how much you are expoſed in a world of trouble, error, and

* 2 Tim. iii. 15.

diſappointments; and how you grieve the hearts of thoſe whoſe chief deſire it is that you may be ſaved. Some of you, perhaps, may have loſt one or both of your religious Parents by death, and will you indulge yourſelves in thoſe pleaſures and gaieties which will wear off all ſerious impreſſions, and prepare the way for a life of licentiouſneſs, only becauſe they are gone, who were a wiſe and awful check and reſtraint upon you? Or rather, will you not endeavour to remember, and feel the force of their living inſtructions, and dying advice? How often have they called upon you, and *taught you in the way you ſhould go?* How often, with the tendereſt affection, wept their advice over you, and enforced every exhortation with a tear? While in the warmeſt manner they prayed with and for you, that you might *eſcape the pollutions that are in the world through luſt*, and not *be entangled in them and overcome*; that you might not cut yourſelves off from the entail of covenant bleſſings, and be miſerable after all! How have their dying words been uttered in the moſt moving accents, if they have been ſenſible of their departure? "I am now no more in the "world, but you are. I am going to the God, "to whom I have been long devoted, and to "whom I have alſo devoted you. You are the "children of the covenant; and it has been my "endeavour to bring you betimes to be acquainted "with the God of your Fathers. And, now I am "going, I leave it as my dying charge, continue "to know, to love, and ſerve him all your days. "*I have taught you in the way of wiſdom, I have "led you in the right path*; ſee then, that when "I am gone, you do not miſtake the way, and "walk in the road to death and endleſs perdi-"tion. Dread above all things to have our next "meeting at the bar of God, to your unſpeak-

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"able confuſion." Now ſhall ſuch a weighty charge as this ſtand for nothing with you? Will you loſe the benefit of the example and counſils of your friends, as well as their bodily preſence? If ſo, you will loſe them quite, and be moſt forlorn and wretched orphans indeed. Be perſuaded then to prevent ſo fatal a miſchief, remember their words, and live their precepts and examples, that you may be the ſteady *followers of thoſe, who thro' faith and patience are inheriting the promiſes.*

And laſtly, let the children of the ſtrangers, of the vain and ungodly, (if there ſhould be any ſuch here) that are now convinced of their need of religious knowledge and good inſtructions, inſtead of deſpairing, with all diligence, ſenſible of their paſt diſadvantages, cry unto God, *My Father, thou ſhalt be the guide of my youth!* Let them cry after this ſpiritual counſil and wiſdom, and * *lift up their voice for this underſtanding*; and then they may hope that they alſo *ſhall underſtand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.*

Let each of us in the ſeveral relations and ſtations of life, wherein the Providence of God has placed us, endeavour to do all we can to promote the cauſe of religion and virtue in a degenerate age; and eſpecially to recommend it to the young, both by our diſcourſe and example, as the moſt reaſonable and pleaſant ſervice. And let the young have their ambition turned for a ſober ſingularity, and a deſire to encreaſe every year in knowledge, as well as ſtature, and in favour with God, as well as man. And let us all, in every remaining period of our lives, be ſolicitous to behave more and more gravely, and wiſely, and uſefully in the world about us; that if we are taken away before our years are any further increaſed, we may the ſooner reap the perfection of our

* Prov. ii. 3, 5.

natures and our happineſs; or if we are continued many more, we may *bring forth fruit, even to old age*, and ſtill be flouriſhing in the church on earth, till we ſhall come to our grave, in a way of righteouſneſs, *like a ſhock of corn fully ripe in its ſeaſon.*

And God grant, that, however we may drop away from one another here year after year, we may all have a happy meeting in a better world; and that Parents and Children, Miniſters and People, may *rejoice together in the day of the Lord Jeſus*, that the inſtructions of religion, and the goſpel of Chriſt, have *been the power of God* to our mutual ſalvation. Amen.

SERMON

SERMON IV.

The peculiar aggravation of Sin in the Children of religious Parents.

1 KINGS XI. 9.

And the Lord was angry with SOLOMON, *because his heart was turned from the* LORD GOD *of* ISRAEL *which appeared unto him twice.*

THROUGH the tender mercy of the moſt High we are brought ſafely to the cloſe of the paſt year, and begin the new by *entering into his courts with thankſgiving, and into his houſe with praiſe.* We come, I hope, with grateful hearts to bleſs his name for the innumerable benefits of our paſt lives; to declare to the world that *the Lord is good, his mercy is everlaſting, and his truth and faithfulneſs endure through all ages and generations.* And then ſurely we are come to fix and eſtabliſh our reſolutions to ſerve and obey this God, to whom we are infinitely indebted; and to learn ſuch a conduct, as that every returning year may find us more ſtrongly attached to the cauſe of religion and virtue; and that, in proportion to our advancing age, we will endeavour to grow in favour with God, as well as man. And as the ſervices of this day are peculiarly devoted

to the young, on theſe occaſions our buſineſs has been to explain the nature of true religion to them, and urge them to the ſpeedy and ſerious practice of it, from the conſideration of the neceſſity of the thing itſelf, the uncertainty of enjoying many years, and the peculiar obligations and advantages it diſcovers to them; to win upon their gratitude, and engage their heart. And as, I would hope, ſuch endeavours have not hitherto been entirely unſucceſsful on all, I come this day to urge and exhort my young friends, (eſpecially thoſe who have begun to ſeek after the Lord God of their Fathers) to continue in his ſervice; and to caution them againſt a departure from him, from a conſideration of the peculiar evil and aggravation which will attend their ſins, and the remarkable diſpleaſure which they will ſubject themſelves to, even of their Father's God.

And to this end I have choſen the words of the text, which contain a melancholy account of one deſcended from an eminent ſaint, and who himſelf had owned the Lord God of his Father, and yet in after life alienated his heart from him. For, *The Lord was angry with* SOLOMON, *becauſe his heart was turned from the* LORD GOD *of* ISRAEL *which had appeared unto him twice.* An awful warning! God grant that we may be ſo wiſe as to conſider it this day for our good, and eſcape the fatal ſnare. In further proſecuting this ſubject I would obſerve the following method.

I. I ſhall conſider that particular part of SOLOMON's hiſtory to which our text has an immediate reference.

II. Make ſome obſervations which may ſeem naturally to ariſe from this account. And then

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III. Conclude with an addreſs to two different ſorts of young perſons, in as ſerious a manner as I can. And I pray God, that all may not be in vain.

I. It will be proper to conſider diſtinctly that part of SOLOMON's hiſtory, to which our text more immediately relates. And to this end, let us

1. Attend to the ſin and revolt of SOLOMON, with the ſpecial aggravations of it. *His heart was turned from the* LORD GOD *of* ISRAEL, his Father's God, *who had appeared unto him twice.* And then,

2. The high provocation of his ſin againſt God, intimated in theſe words, *The* LORD *was angry with* SOLOMON.

1. Let us attend to the ſin and revolt of SOLOMON, and the ſpecial aggravations of his crime.

The crime, the revolt was this, that *his heart was turned from the* LORD GOD *of* ISRAEL. He went aſide from the worſhip and adoration of JEHOVAH, the only living and true God, the *God* of *Iſrael* (who was eminently their God) after *other gods*; after * *Aſhtoreth the Goddeſs of the Zidonians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites*; *i. e.* worſhiped *Venus*, and the *Sun*, (which ſome underſtand by theſe falſe deities) *and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his Father; but did evil in the ſight of the Lord, and built an high place*, or an *altar*, in the *groves* for *Chemoſh*, or *Saturn*,

* 1 Kings xi. 5, 6, 7.

the ſuppoſed Father of *Jupiter* the chief God of the heathen. This was his iniquity, and to this it is ſaid, *his heart was turned*; not that he had forſaken entirely the worſhip of the GOD of ISRAEL, but he had mixed theſe heatheniſh corruptions and idolatries with that worſhip. And therefore it is expreſſed in another verſe, by his * *heart not being perfect before God*, or entirely devoted to his worſhip alone, as was that of *David* his Father.

Yet, as the GOD of ISRAEL was the only true God, when he began to join theſe idols with him for a ſhare in his honour and worſhip, SOLOMON did, properly ſpeaking, turn and alienate his worſhip from him to thoſe to whom it was not due. It is very remarkable here, that his great fault is charged upon the heart. This intimates, that his defection and apoſtaſy began in his heart; that he had entertained favourable thoughts and affections towards theſe corruptions, before he engaged in the practice of them; and then, that afterwards by his conduct he ſhewed that his heart and affections were fully in his idolatry. Thus SOLOMON afterwards ſpeaks of † *the backſlider in heart as filled with his own ways*; *the backſlider in heart*, *i. e.* one who in his heart is firſt alienated from the ways of God, and then afterwards by a wicked life. This then was the ſin of SOLOMON, *his turning away his heart from God to idolatry*; the dividing his regards, and gradually neglecting the true God, that he might comply with the ſinful forms of worſhip among the heathen.

Let us now attend to the particular circumſtances that aggravate his revolt. And indeed the text, and other parts of the hiſtory of SOLOMON taken to-

* 1 Kings xi. 4. † Prov. xiv. 14.

together, repreſent this crime as notoriouſly heinous and preſumptuous.

It was the LORD GOD of ISRAEL that he *turned from* to the *works of mens hands*. SOLOMON was king of Iſrael, a people peculiarly devoted to God. He *had heard with his ears*, and his anceſtors *had told him, what great things the Lord had done for them*; and had evident aſſurance that the Lord JEHOVAH was the only living and true God, and that therefore to him only did all religious worſhip and homage belong. And at the ſame time he could not but be convinced that the *gods of the heathen were vanity, and a lie*; that as they were the *work of mens hands*, they could not relieve nor ſupply the wants of their makers. To turn therefore from the true God to theſe, muſt argue inexcuſable folly and wickedneſs; eſpecially ſince SOLOMON was ſo famed for his wiſdom, that it is ſaid, † *he was wiſer than all men*. For him to turn aſide, the great, the wiſe king of Iſrael, to commit ſuch folly, as to turn from the Lord of heaven and earth to worſhip idols, was ſomething ſo unaccountably wicked and ungrateful, that we are almoſt loſt in ſurprize at the mention of it. One would think that a man of a common and very ordinary ſiz'd underſtanding could have diſtinguiſhed here, (eſpecially with the help of a revelation) ſo as eaſily to diſcern the abſurdity of ſuch a conduct; but the wiſeſt man, him who had ſearched into all the ſeveral parts of nature, and traced a God thro' all his works, for him to run counter to his reaſon and underſtanding, in ſuch an egregious manner, muſt be uncommonly ſtrange and perverſe.

Again, that which further aggravates SOLOMON's ſin is his peculiarly religious deſcent, and the extraordinary education he had received from his

* 1 Kings iv. 31.

his Father. He was not deſcended from a common Iſraelite, but from *David*. This pious Father was conſtantly ſolicitous that his Son ſhould walk in the way of the GOD of ISRAEL, and keep cloſe to him. He had, no doubt, from early life taken particular care to inſtruct him in the Law, and Statutes, and Ordinances of this God of ISRAEL, and his obligations to him; and the further he advanced in life towards maturity, the more frequent and ſolemn were his prayers for him, and his counſils and charges to him. And when he was near his own end he thus expreſſes himſelf, with reference to the keeping up the worſhip of the true God, after he was dead, by SOLOMON's building the temple for that purpoſe; * *The Lord give thee wiſdom and underſtanding, that thou mayeſt keep the Law of the Lord thy God. Then ſhalt thou proſper, if thou takeſt heed to fulfil the Statutes and Judgements which the Lord charged Moſes with concerning Iſrael.* Again, † *thou* SOLOMON, *my Son, know thou the God of thy Father, and ſerve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord ſearcheth all hearts, and underſtandeth all the imagination of the thoughts; if thou ſeek him, he will be found of thee, but if thou forſake him, he will caſt thee off for ever.* He then, after all theſe warnings, could not ſin at ſo cheap a rate as others, he muſt have ſtronger and more violent ſtruggles with conſcience. And for him therefore, for this SOLOMON to alienate his heart from ſuch a God, his Father's God, and to whom he had been devoted by *David*, muſt argue very heinous guilt.

Add to this, that he had entered on life himſelf with a public ſolemn acknowledgment of this God, had been favoured with extraordinary appearances of God to him, and tokens of his ſpecial favour and appro-

* 1 Chron. xxii. 12, 13. † Chap. xxviii. 4.

appprobation. He at firſt ſet out well, upon his Father's principles; and it is reported of him, that, * SOLOMON *loved the Lord, walking in the Statutes of David his Father.* And therefore he had peculiar favours, and marks of the divine approbation. Thus it is ſaid particularly, that *God appeared to him twice*, firſt in † *Gibeon the Lord appeared to* SOLOMON *in a dream by night, and God ſaid, Aſk, what I ſhall give thee. And* SOLOMON *ſaid, Thou haſt ſhewed unto thy ſervant David my Father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and righteouſneſs, and in uprightneſs of heart with thee*; (here was an acknowledgment of his Father's extraordinary piety) *and thou haſt kept for him this great kindneſs, that thou has given him a Son to ſit on his throne.* ‡ *And now, O Lord, thou haſt made thy ſervant king inſtead of David his Father; and I am but as a little child. Give therefore thy ſervant an underſtanding heart, and wiſdom, and knowledge, that I may diſcern between good and bad. And the ſpeech pleaſed the Lord; and God ſaid unto* SOLOMON, *Becauſe thou haſt aſked this thing; and haſt not aſked for thyſelf long life, nor riches for thyſelf, nor the life of thine enemies, but haſt aſked for thyſelf underſtanding to diſcern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy words. Lo, I have given thee a wiſe and an underſtanding heart, ſo that there was none like thee before, neither after thee ſhall any ariſe like unto thee: and I have alſo given thee that which thou haſt not aſked, both riches and honour; and if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my Statutes, as thy Father David did*, (there was a ſolemn intimation to him of his Father's piety) *I will lengthen thy days.* The next appearance of God to SOLOMON was after his finiſhing the temple, and his own ſpecial dedication of that and himſelf to

* 1 Kings iii. 3. † Ver. 5, &c. ‡ 2 Chron. i. 8, &c.

to God. * *The Lord appeared to him the ſecond time, as he had appeared to him in Gibeon,* (probably in the *Shechina*, or ſome viſible and illuſtrious token of his preſence) *and the Lord ſaid, I have heard thy prayer and ſupplication. And if thou wilt but walk before me, as thy Father David walked, in integrity of heart, and uprightneſs, to do all that I have commanded thee, then I will eſtabliſh the throne of thy kingdom for ever, as I promiſed David thy Father. But if you ſhall at all turn from following me, and go and ſerve other gods, and worſhip them, then I will cut off Iſrael out of the land.* And yet, after all ſuch engagements on SOLOMON's ſide, ſuch ſignal appearances on God's, and ſuch warnings of his danger, SOLOMON's *heart was turned from the Lord God of his Father,* the GOD of ISRAEL. What preſumption, what daring iniquity, what a contradiction to his own vows, what ſhocking ingratitude, and what awful puniſhment muſt he expect!

I only add, laſtly, the occaſion of his revolt, inſtead of excuſing him, aggravates his fault the more. He gave himſelf up to vice and ſenſuality, which ſtifled the cool reflexions of his reaſon, and weakened the force of all his wiſdom; and, being led captive by the intoxicating ſnares of luſt and debauchery, he was eaſily won over to thoſe compliances and practices which would make him ſecure in his effeminate indulgences.

This is the account of SOLOMON's backſliding and revolt from God. And, if we lay the ſeveral circumſtances together, we muſt conclude the great evil and guilt of it. Let us now

2. Juſt conſider the ſpecial diſpleaſure of God againſt him.

This

* 1 Kings xi. 11.

This is intimated in theſe words, *The Lord was angry with him.* This expreſſion does not hint at a meer common diſpleaſure, but ſomething very terrible, and to be manifeſted in proportion to the greatneſs of his crime, and his ingratitude. And, in the verſes after our text, we find the marks and effects of this indignation; *The Lord ſaid,* * *foraſmuch as this is done of thee, and thou haſt not kept my Covenant, and my Statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will ſurely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy ſervant.* Thus did he bring down the judgments threatened on himſelf, and became afterwards expoſed till his death to adverſaries and wars, and left a curſe to his children; nay, and what little remainder of eaſe he poſſeſſed, in intervals, was not owing to himſelf but for the ſake of his Father *David.* But it is now time to proceed to the next general head of diſcourſe.

II. To make ſeveral obſervations from this awful hiſtory, which may be of uſe to us all; and eſpecially to the deſcendants of religious Parents. And I believe, if we attend, theſe following will be found naturally to ariſe from it.

1. From the family of SOLOMON we may obſerve, that it is a very great honour and advantage to deſcend from religious Parents, whoſe firſt buſineſs it was to inſtruct us in the knowledge and worſhip of the true God, and our obligations to him.

I am ſenſible this may be reckoned talking in a very rough and unfaſhionable manner among thoſe who are ſet up as the only ſtandards of po-

* 1 Kings xi. 11.

liteneſs, and are fired with a love of worldly fame, and the applauſe of a giddy unthinking crowd. But ſtill I muſt venture to aſſert that a religious deſcent is in itſelf the moſt honourable. For our judgment of honour is not to be taken from the partial opinion of others, nor from the dictates of paſſion, but from the truth and reaſon of things. And then we cannot but conclude that the knowledge of the true God, the practice of his commands, and ſtated reverence of his authority, reflects the greateſt honour on that perſon who wears ſuch a character; becauſe it promotes his reſemblance of that Being who is the fountain of all that is truly great and excellent, and the ſtandard of perfection; and therefore will procure the moſt diſtinguiſhing marks of favour and honour from him. And conſequently to be deſcended from ſuch a Parent reflects an honour upon the child.

Now if this concluſion is juſt, then ſurely the other part of the obſervation naturally follows, *viz.* that a religious deſcent is of great advantage. This is evident, becauſe if all honour is reckoned in itſelf an advantage, even that which is but imaginary, and only ſo in the opinion, how much more then is real honour to be eſteemed as truly and really advantageous? Wherever then perſons enjoy the happineſs of a religious parentage, the advantage is inſeparable. It is a great advantage in point of early education and inſtruction. As are the Parents, ſuch generally will be the child at firſt. If they live without God in the world, and are diſregardful of virtue, the child ſhall be indulged in all its low appetites and paſſions, and the growth and improvement of the animal part will be only the matter of their concern. The firſt dawnings of reaſon are then chiefly valued as a mere diverſion; and ſo the mind is ſuffered to lie

lie without any proper culture, till it brings forth nothing but thorns and briars, which will tear the friendly hand that in after-life ſhall endeavour to remove them. But now the truly religious Parent, whoſe own heart is devoted to God, who is endeavouring to *walk in all the Ordinances and Commandments of God* himſelf, and conſiders his family, not gathered only for the preſent ſtate, but chiefly as a conſtitution for another eternal world; ſuch a Parent will reckon it his indiſpenſable duty to devote his child to God; and, to ſhow that his devotion is not mockery, will reckon it of the greateſt importance to ſeaſon the mind of his child with principles of true ſolid religion. To this end he will begin betimes, watch the firſt efforts of reaſon, and will endeavour to let in knowledge by degrees; and be very ſolicitous that, as ſoon as it can call him Father, it ſhall be taught to know ſomething of God its Father who is in heaven.

Now this firſt forming the mind is of great advantage, as it diſpoſes for all further methods of inſtruction, prepares ſooner for hearkening to the calls of divine Providence and grace in after-life, and for attending upon the ſtated miniſtrations of the goſpel with more conſiderable knowledge and improvement; ſo that, if it is not their own fault afterwards, the *ſeed of the kingdom* may take a ſpeedier root, and flouriſh in them in a fuller and fairer manner. Their religious deſcent alſo is an advantage in their approaches to God. Thus *David* ſpeaks of himſelf, * *O Lord, I am thy ſervant, truly I am thy ſervant, and the ſon of thine handmaid. God* never *ſaid to the ſeed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain.*

Laſtly, not to mention other inſtances, the deſcendants of religious Parents very often fare the

* Pſal. cxvi. 16.

better in this world for the piety of their anceſtors. How often do we read of God's bleſſing the *Iſraelites*, and delivering them from temporal evils, becauſe of their Fathers *Abraham*, *Iſaac*, and *Jacob?* † *He bleſſeth the habitation of the juſt*; and it is I believe often obſerved, that ſuch ſhare in temporal good things, tho' by their after diſobedience they cut off the entail of ſpiritual and eternal bleſſings from themſelves.

II. My next obſervation, from the firſt part of SOLOMON's hiſtory, is, that when the children of religious Parents begin to *ſeek after* and *know the God of their Fathers*, it is peculiarly pleaſing to this God.

This you may recollect from the addreſs of SOLOMON to his GOD, his acknowledgment of his deſcent; his prayer for a wiſe and underſtanding heart; and the peculiar approbation diſcovered in God's remarkable appearances to him. Thus it is mentioned of *Joſiah*, with a peculiar emphaſis, that ‡ *in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to ſeek after the Lord God of his Fathers*; and likewiſe of ſeveral good men *walking in the ways of their Fathers*, eſpecially of *David*. And no doubt but this muſt be peculiarly agreeable to God; becauſe as he cannot but love true goodneſs every where, ſo where a Parent has been high in his favour on account of his own holineſs, the early beginings of it in the child will be greatly acceptable; as they ſhow the influence of the example and inſtructions of the Parent, and are ſtrong intimations of a mind convinced of its obligations to God betimes, and diſpoſed, by continued care, for being more ſerviceable and uſeful in the world, and ſpreading the ſavour of religion far

† Prov. iii. 33. ‡ 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3.

far and wide. Of ſuch God himſelf may be ſuppoſed to ſpeak in the language of the Prophet, * *I remember the kindneſs of thy youth.* They are eſteemed as children of the covenant, and God's peculiar treaſure. And though none ſhall go without the bleſſings of his grace that ſeek for them in earneſt, theſe may hope, according to God's promiſe, to ſhare in them ſooner; becauſe their applications are generally before others, and their minds ſooner and better prepared and diſpoſed to cheriſh and improve them. But yet

III. I obſerve, that notwithſtanding all the honour and advantage that ariſes from a religious deſcent, and the promiſing beginings of ſuch deſcendants themſelves, it is poſſible, in after life, they may burſt their bonds aſunder, and *turn from the Lord God of their Fathers*; and therefore that ſuch advantages are no abſolute ſecurity, in themſelves, of their future and final perſeverance in goodneſs, any farther than they make them ſo by their own ſerious and conſtant endeavours.

One would think, indeed, that after ſuch early care in the Parent, and the appearing ſucceſs of it in the behaviour of the child at firſt, it would be very improbable he ſhould afterwards apoſtatiſe; that after ſuch a due preparation of the ground, the early ſpringing up of the ſeed, and the full and lively proſpect of fruit, nothing could diſappoint the hopes, or blaſt the harveſt. But tho', at firſt, the probability may appear on the ſide of a life of future religion, yet it is very poſſible the conduct may turn out differently hereafter. Nay, melancholy experience convinces us that this is no rare or ſtrange event. How often are the

* Jer. ii. 2.

forward bloſſoms kill'd by temptation; and thoſe trees which were planted young in the *courts of the houſe of the Lord*, and which we thought would flouriſh in all the beauty of holineſs, when their Parents ſhould be removed into the heavenly paradiſe, how oft are theſe removed into a different ſoil, and withered in the ſhades of death? Our text furniſhes us with a dreadful inſtance of ſuch a backſlider, as we have already ſeen in the hiſtory. Here was SOLOMON, the Son of *David*, in covenant with God, and devoted to him by his Father; SOLOMON, who at *firſt loved God*, and was *beloved by him*, even him we find afterwards *turning his heart from the* LORD GOD of ISRAEL.

Joaſh, who was remarkable for early piety, and was preſerved in it by the good prieſt *Jehoiada*, and continued to practiſe upon the religious principles which he had imbibed in his youth, during the life of his faithful guardian; * yet, when *Jehoiada* was dead, he hearkened to evil counſilors; and he with his people left the *houſe of the God of their Fathers*. So that he, who firſt begun as an extraordinary example of zeal for the ſervice of the true God, now led the way to idolatry. And this truth we learn alſo from the confeſſions, the prayers, and tears of pious Parents in every age. Alas, how often may we hear a holy Father, or an aged diſtreſſed Mother, thus lamenting—"*O my ſon Abſalom*, I am ſadly di-
" ſtreſſed for him, and my bowels are troubled!
" I gave him up to God, and inſtructed him be-
" times; and he then received my counſils with
" pleaſure. He began early to enquire after
" God his Maker. I remember the *good things*
" *that were found in him towards the Lord God of*
" *his Fathers*; he ſet out in ſuch a manner, that
" he was my growing joy and delight, and the
" admi-

* 2 Chron. xxiv. 3, 17.

" admiration of the wiſe and good. But alas, a " death upon my hopes! This appearance is " over; and he has now *forſaken the guide of his* " *youth, and forgotten the covenant of his God*; and " has *turned from the way of righteouſneſs* into the " *paths of the deſtroyer*; all my expectations are " daſhed, and my grey hairs are droping with " incurable ſorrow into the grave."

I do not here ſuppoſe that it is criminal for the child of a religious Parent, who has been bred up to ſerious piety in one way, to differ from his Parent as to ſome particular notions in after-life, if upon examination he finds they will not bear the ſtreſs which has formerly been laid upon them. This he may do and yet keep his piety and his regard to practical religion as firm as ever. For we are obliged to no principles only becauſe they are the principles of our Parents, any farther than we ſee, upon an impartial ſearch, the reaſon of things and the truth of God on our ſide; then, and then only, do they come with a force upon conſcience. Tho' the religious ſentiments and manners of our Parents demand ſo much regard from us as that we ſhould give them a fair hearing, and not caſt them off, merely thro' a love of new opinions, without enquiring at all. It is not an alteration of ſentiments, in ſome ſuppoſed matters of religion, but forſaking the ſteady practice of religion itſelf, that is apoſtaſy; and which is too often found in the children of good Parents. And this brings me to the next obſervation.

IV. That ſuch revolt and apoſtaſy begins in the heart; and that giving a looſe to ſenſual inclinations and luſtful indulgences is the leading ſtep to all the greateſt lengths in wickedneſs.

It

It is the heart that is firſt alienated, and the affections are drawn off from God, before ever the practice alters. Perſons do not fall all at once from great profeſſions into notorious habits of wickedneſs. Perhaps, indeed, the firſt act may be very ſcandalous; but the mind has been no doubt preparing for it before-hand, and the heart gradually *hardening thro' the deceitfulneſs of ſin*. When a young perſon has been for ſome time in the profeſſion of religion, the novelty of it abates; the love of which, beating ſtrong in a youthful heart, will (if indulged, and the religion is not fixed upon rational grounds) incline the heart to ſomething elſe; ſo that the regards to God decline, the private devotion is interrupted, or ſcarce ever rightly performed; at length, all is confined to external behaviour; and, in conſequence of this, the heart is more diſpoſed to retain other gueſts. And, when the paſſions are thus ſtrong, ſenſual inclinations are more indulged and cheriſhed, and the ſoul and ſpirit are defiled before-hand; till, having contracted an habitual pollution, the man is brought under the dominion of the carnal mind; which at length, when ſuitable opportunities and temptations offer, delivers him over to the moſt lewd and debauched practices. And thus being drawn aſide, and all the paſſions of his heart enſlaved, he either throws off all regards to and profeſſion of true religion; or elſe ſuffers ſenſe ſo far to blind his reaſon and judgment as to make it ſubſervient to his vices. This was the progreſs of ſin and apoſtaſy in the caſe of SOLOMON. And thus have others gone the ſame unhappy path, till they have run into like dreadful lengths of wickedneſs. And then, as SOLOMON himſelf declares after his repentance, few or none that go in this road of vice

vice *return* to God *again*, * *neither take they hold of the path of life.* But

v. I obſerve, that whenever ſuch deſcendants of religious Parents turn from God, their ſins are peculiarly aggravated, and their puniſhment will be dreadfully ſevere.

The ſins of ſuch backſliders are peculiarly aggravated in the ſight of God. They are chargeable with the blackeſt ingratitude. For they reject him who has been the moſt kind and favourable friend; and turn againſt that mercy and grace which they once felt the power of, and owned had overcome their hearts. They are burſting the ſtrongeſt cords of love aſunder that are poſſible to hold reaſonable creatures; and turning all the abundant riches of divine grace manifeſted to them into wantonneſs. They have known, and ſeen, and acknowledged, the remarkable appearances of God for them, and the ſpecial bleſſings, both of a temporal and ſpiritual nature, they have ſhared in; and yet they are requiting him evil for his abundant goodneſs. And then they are chargeable with moſt notorious baſeneſs and perfidiouſneſs, for they turn from that God to whom they had devoted themſelves, to ſin and all iniquity which is of the devil his implacable enemy.

Again, they muſt take greater pains to harden themſelves in wickedneſs than others. They cannot plead prejudice of education to excuſe them, for that is on the ſide of their religion; they cannot plead the want of the knowledge of and engagements to virtue, for they have known more than others, and been under the ſtrongeſt engagements. They muſt conquer then the prejudice

* Prov. ii. 19.

judice of education, not where it was faulty but right and juſt. They muſt go againſt all the ſtream of example in their own families. They muſt be at perpetual war with their own conſciences, which muſt reproach and laſh them in the moſt terrible and painful manner. Nay, they muſt offer violence to the Spirit of God, and reſiſt him with an high hand. Lord, what hard and dreadful work is this! What ſtrong barriers muſt ſuch ſiners break through before they can travel in the broad way to deſtruction! What high fences muſt they climb over to run away from this fold; and how muſt the thorns and briars tear their very ſouls, at every ſuch dangerous attempt, and pierce them thro' with ten thouſand ſorrows! Their road to heaven would be eaſy to them in compariſon with the children of wicked Parents; but they muſt labour hard for deſtruction, and earn damnation at the moſt expenſive rate! And how provoking this is to a God who is ſo earneſtly deſirous of their ſalvation!

Again, they generally go further in ſin than others, when once they apoſtatiſe. Their new companions will hardly think them ſincere in vice, who were once ſo zealous for God, unleſs they become remarkably induſtrious for the devil, and endeavor to find out new ways to perdition.

And then, in conſequence of this, ſuch draw away multitudes to deſtruction after them, and harden all others in their rebellion and wickedneſs.

And their repentance and recovery is much more improbable, and attended with the moſt frightful difficulties.

Now as all theſe conſiderations aggravate the guilt of the revolt and apoſtaſy of thoſe who have begun to walk in the way of their Father's God, ſo ſurely their puniſhment from God at laſt muſt be

be awfully ſevere too. He often puniſhes them in this world, and in ſuch a manner as to make them contemptible to their companions in ſin, and a ſcorn to all about them; and ſuffers this contempt to purſue them even to the grave. This is very remarkable in the caſe of *Joaſh*, after his wicked departure, and his rejecting and killing the good Prophet, who was ſent to reclaim him. God ſuffered the * *Syrians with a ſmall company to execute judgment upon* Joaſh; *and when they were departed from him, leaving him in great diſeaſes, his own ſervants conſpired againſt him, and ſlew him on his bed, and he died*; and tho' *he was buried in the city of* David, yet *not in the ſepulchres of the Kings.*

And if ever ſuch are brought back it muſt be in the greateſt bitterneſs of ſoul, and with the moſt terrible agonies of conſcience.

But if they die in their apoſtaſy, how dreadful will be their puniſhment in another world! Whoever is puniſhed in a gentle manner, they ſhall find that their *damnation ſlumbers not.* I cannot repreſent this, in a ſhort and comprehenſive manner, better than in the words of a moſt judicious † Preacher upon ſuch a ſubject. "Their own "minds, ſays he, muſt be perpetually employed "in ſharper recriminations than others; that "when *they were not far from the kingdom of God*, "they would not enter in; that they deſpiſed "their day of ſalvation; rebelled againſt the "God to whoſe ſervice they were dedicated; "ſlighted the Saviour by whoſe name they were "called; abandoned the good ways into which "they were entered, and in effect, choſe death "rather than life. How uncomfortable muſt be "their

* 2 Chron. xxiv. 24, 25. † Dr. *Evans.* See his Sermons to Young People, pages 38, 39. publiſhed 1725.

" their meeting with their pious Parents, when " they recollect the grief they gave them! How " great their confuſion, when they ſhall find " their Parents warnings verified in the fatal e- " vent! When they ſhall ſee them on the right " hand of Chriſt, but themſelves on the left! " How ſpeechleſs muſt they be, when their very " Parents ſtand up againſt them, and approve the " righteous ſentence of a provoked God! And " what that ſentence will be, how ſevere and " terrible, I ſhall leave to their own ſilent reflec- " tions upon that awful paſſage, * *The children* " *of the kingdom ſhall be caſt into outer darkneſs*; " *there ſhall be weeping, and gnaſhing of teet.*"

Thus have I finiſhed the ſubject; and upon the whole we may obſerve, that God is ſo far from not ſeeing, or being angry with, ſin in thoſe who were once his people, that he is peculiarly provoked with it. † *You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will puniſh you for your iniquities.*

I ſhall now conclude with a ſhort addreſs to two ſorts of perſons.

1. To thoſe who, being deſcended from religious Parents, have begun with the God of their Fathers, but in growing life turned their hearts from him to ſin and iniquity. If there ſhould be any ſuch in this aſſembly, the words of my text are pointed ſharply at their hearts; and, oh, that they may but enter!

1. Through the patience and forbearance of God you are ſpared, with all your aggravated guilt and provocations about you, another year, inſtead of being cut off in vengeance; and inſtead of hearing the dreadful ſentence, *Depart ye curſed* from

* Mat. viii. 12. † Amos iii. 2.

from an angry God, are allowed to tread his earthly courts again, and to hear the expoſtulations of a fellow-creature, pleading with you in his name, and thus addreſſing you in a cool hour, * *Now ſaith the Lord of Hoſts, conſider your ways.* Now it is peculiarly proper; do not therefore refuſe the invitation.

Conſider then what haſt thou done; thou haſt forſaken the Lord God of thy Fathers after thou hadſt once owned him as the guide of thy youth. And did not the breach begin on thy ſide? † *What iniquity then haſt thou found in this God, that thou haſt departed from him?* Is he not the *God that made thee*; that *fed thee all thy life long unto this day*; *the God that redeemed thee from all evil?* Is he not thy Father's God? And has he not viſited thee with ſpecial and particular kindneſſes on that account? Has he not remarkably appeared for thee in imminent dangers and diſtreſſes? Once has he ſhown himſelf thy God, and twice has he revealed his love, and cauſed all his goodneſs to paſs before thee; and for which of theſe good works is it that thou art turned from him? ‡ *Do ye thus requite the Lord, O fooliſh people and unwiſe?* Conſider, yet further, what a diſgrace you have brought upon your family. Perhaps, you are the only wicked branch for many generations; and if the alliance of the ſon of a noble with perſons of mean rank is reckoned a diſhonor to the blood, what a ſtain and blemiſh have you brought into a family of God, all the members of which are devoted to him, while you have joined yourſelves with the wicked, the ungodly, and the ſiner?

Again, conſider what you have forſaken God for. What has engaged your heart from him? A baſe luſt, the life of a brute, for which inſtinct would have ſerved as well. If you ſhould, after

I pro-

* Haggai i. 7. † Jerem. ii. 5. ‡ Deut. xxxii. 6.

promiſing beginings, have gone ſo far in vice as to have felt the ſad effects of it in yourſelves, in your conſtitutions, let me aſk you in the words of the great Apoſtle, * *What fruit have you in thoſe things, whereof you are now aſhamed?* God may have *writen bitter things againſt you*, and *made you to poſſeſs the ſins of your youth*, when you turned from your firſt devotion; † *know therefore, and ſee, that it was an evil and bitter thing that thou haſt forſaken this God*; and that his fear was not, after all, ſo ſtrongly rooted in thee as to guard thy ſenſes and paſſions. And thus let *thine own wickedneſs correct thee*, and *thy backſlidings reprove thee*.

And then conſider, laſtly, not only the greatneſs of thy ſin, but of thy miſery in another world without repentance.

But ſtill if, after all, thou haſt any thoughts of a return, do not deſpair. God is this day calling to you eminently, ‡ *Return you backſliding children, and I will heal your backſlidings.* If you are at a loſs for an anſwer, read the following words; and God grant that they may come from the heart of every prodigal this day. *Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God!*

And, to urge you ſtill more to this return, think of the pleaſure and joy it will afford to ſee you find your way back again to the fold of God. There will be joy on earth, and ‖ *in heaven in the preſence of the angels of God*; and perhaps among your good Parents that are got ſafe there already; and God himſelf will be pleaſed too. For, as it is ingeniouſly expreſſed, " of all the pieces of " ſilver that were loſt in the duſt and corruption " of this world, God is peculiarly pleaſed when " thoſe are found again that had his image and " ſuper-

* Rom. vi. 21. † Jer. ii. 19. ‡ Jer. iii. 22.
‖ Luke xv. 10.

" ſuperſcription of old; though they had been " miſſing for a long while."

2. I muſt now ſhut up all with an addreſs to thoſe deſcendants of religious Parents, who, as yet, have eſcaped the corruption that is in the world thro' luſt.

And of this number, I would hope, is the chief part of my audience.

If as yet you are indifferent about ſtrict religion, think it high time this day to determine. *How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God*, the God of your Fathers, *ſerve him*; *but if Baal*, if pleaſure be God, then follow that, and take the conſequence. Be aſſured, that while you remain unfixed, and undevoted to God, you are a more eaſy prey to the grand enemy. Or if you ſhould abſtain from notorious vices, it is not ſo much your real virtue, your regard to God, as ſome low and falſe principle that governs you.

But there are, I believe, others that have begun to love and ſerve this God; and, when they have felt the power of education, and ſeen the excellency of their Parents characters, have come to this point, *Thy people ſhall be my people, and thy God my God.* And, no doubt, but your reſolutions are ſtill for him. Yet, my friends, *be not high-minded, but fear.* You live in a world full of temptations; and tho' you may have eſcaped in paſt years, yet you will find every new one full of ſnares too; and as your converſe enlarges, and your paſſions have a wider play, you may have ſuch aſſaults as, formerly, you would have ſhuddered at the thought of. Your paſt goodneſs is no ſecurity for your future, without growing watchfulneſs and prayer. See then that in this way you give all diligence to arrive at the ſame, or greater

heights of goodneſs than your anceſtors; that it may not be a leſſening of your character, as it was of ſome, that tho' they *walked in the ways of God*, yet *not as did their Fathers*.

I have ſet before you an awful example; and I have endeavoured to point out the rocks and quickſands upon which numbers of precious immortal ſouls have been for ever loſt. See then that you keep the ſtrait courſe, and never *make ſhipwreck of faith* and *a good conſcience*. To avoid this, be perſwaded to take SOLOMON's advice, after his repentance, and * *keep your hearts with all diligence, becauſe out of them are the iſſues of life*; that ſo you incline not to the ways of ſin, nor go aſtray in the paths of vice. And to your watchfulneſs againſt ſuch ſnares, join your frequent and earneſt prayers for divine aſſiſtance to him *who is alone able to keep you from falling, and to preſent you at laſt faultleſs before the preſence of his glory with exceeding joy*.

And, as ever you would preſerve the purity of your hearts, guard your ſenſes. Temptations and a world of iniquity enter by the ear and the eye. *Turn away* then *thine eyes from beholding vanity*, and turn away your ears from frequenting thoſe enchanting diverſions, which, tho' not criminal in themſelves, yet draw on the ſoul inſenſibly into the gay thoughtleſs life, and ſenſual pleaſures. For, however ſtiff and preciſe we may be reckoned for perſwading to ſuch reſtraints, yet this is certain, that the indulgence to theſe things is *like the leting out of waters*; at firſt they may be eaſily ſtoped, but if ſuffered to flow on will carry down the banks, and deluge all the neighbouring country. Let your regards to God, your ſtated devotions, and ſacramental engagements, always curb the levity of your tempers, and teach you that

* Prov. iv. 23.

that there is a ſeaſon for all things; not only a time for mirth and entertainments, but a time to be ſerious, and a time to die. And then, whatever year may be our laſt, whether this we are now entered on, or ſome one ſucceeding, we ſhall, by a life of piety, uſefulneſs, and devotion, be prepared for a ſtation at the right hand of God, and a full ſatisfaction from thoſe pleaſures which flow at his right hand for evermore.

SERMON V.

The WORD of GOD the beſt youthful Guide.

PSALM CXIX. 9.

Wherewith ſhall a young Man cleanſe his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy WORD.

I AM aware that ſome very judicious Paraphraſts make all this verſe only one entire queſtion, thus, *Wherewith ſhall a young Man cleanſe his way, by taking heed thereto, according to thy Word? q. d.* Is this the means, the regarding the word of God? And indeed this ſenſe may intimate, a ſuppoſed acknowledgment that the word of God is the moſt likely means for this purpoſe. But, as there is no direct anſwer to the words in the verſes immediately following, and as the laſt part of the text ſeems exactly like an anſwer to the firſt, there are others who underſtand it in this ſenſe, and according to the common reading and pointing of our tranſlation. And therefore in this manner I ſhall enlarge on the words as they lie before us.

I. By endeavouring to explain the meaning of the enquiry, *Wherewith ſhall a young Man cleanſe his way?*

II. By

II. By propoſing to your ſerious conſideration the ſolid and judicious anſwer, *By taking heed thereto according to thy Word.*

I. Let us attend to the true meaning of the queſtion, *Wherewith ſhall a young Man cleanſe his way?*

And I doubt not but all young perſons preſent will reckon themſelves very nearly concerned in this ſubject. Let me then requeſt the attention of each of you while I enlarge a little more diſtinctly on this firſt general head.

And I apprehend we may underſtand this expreſſion, of a *young Man's cleanſing his way*, to refer either to his firſt ſeting out in life, ſo as that he may avoid the corruptions and ſnares of a wicked world, and keep himſelf clean from moral defilement; or elſe, if he has unhappily ſteped aſide at the begining into bad ways, to his geting well out of them again, and cleanſing and purifying himſelf from their defilement.

1. This inquiry, *Wherewith ſhall the young cleanſe their way?* may be ſuppoſed to refer to their firſt ſeting out in life, how the young ſhall keep themſelves free from the pollutions and defilements of a wicked world, and eſcape the corruptions that are therein thro' luſt.

Agreeably to this ſenſe of the words the Seventy Interpreters thus tranſlate the expreſſion, *How ſhall a Youth guide and direct his way*, ſo as to keep it ſtrait, and ſafe, and honourable? For all theſe ideas ſeem included in the word there uſed. And, I think, this appears to be the chief and primary meaning of the text, as I have already ſuppoſed

poſed in the introduction; and it evidently ſuggeſts to us the following things.

1. That there are very bad ways, and foul paths, into which the young are in eminent danger of turning aſide.

That there are very bad ways in the paſſage thro' this world, into which, if men fall, they defile and pollute their ſouls, and render themſelves unfit for all the proper imployments and pleaſures of reaſonable beings travelling thro' a ſtate of trial to an everlaſting felicity; and in which they are ſadly diſtreſſed, involved, and very often wretchedly uncomfortable and ſorrowful; is a truth ſo evident, that it needs no laboured proof at all. Only go to the chamber of a weather-beaten ſiner, ſinking under the decays of a frail body, worn almoſt out in the cauſe of iniquity, and aſk him whether, upon the whole, he does not think that the ways of tranſgreſſors are hard? And this will very probably be the anſwer that he gives, "*The end of theſe things is death.*" Aſk an old habitual rioter, or a wretched debauchee, quite emaciated and hagged with his former exceſſes, what ſort of a journey he has had thro' life? And he will tell you that, "however ſmooth the "path appeared at firſt, it was bitterneſs in the "end; that his fleſh is juſt gone, and his bones "are quite full of his former iniquities." And, if he can yet have ſtrength to lift a feeble hand or a languiſhing eye to heaven, you may hear this mournful and diſconſolate addreſs, * *O Lord, thou writeſt bitter things againſt me, and makeſt me to poſſeſs the ſins of my youth!* And let even the man, who has choſen the road of wealth, and the path to worldly honour, as what was moſt agreable to his

* Job xiii. 26.

his eager deſires and reſtleſs ambition, and which he vainly fancied would anſwer all his expectations, but confeſs his own real ſentiments at laſt, and he will tell you, that "he was ſadly miſtaken "and cheated; that he walked on in a very dan-"gerous deception; that his proſperity was his "ſnare, and proved only the proſperity of fools to "deſtroy him; and that he is afraid of periſhing "with a lie in his right hand." Nay, let any, but the truly conſiſtent and regularly virtuous, ſpeak, and they will all acknowledge from experience the various evil paths that are in the world, and the fatal and deſtructive tendency of them; and that it is only with reſpect to the way of religion and virtue that it can ſtrictly and truly be ſaid, * *In the way of righteouſneſs there is life, and in the path thereof there is no death.*

Now, as there are ſuch various foul and bad ways, and as the teſtimony and experience of many in every age and generation evidence the truth of the aſſertion, ſo it is evident the young are eminently in danger of falling into them.

This danger ariſes partly from ignorance and inexperience. The traveller, at his firſt entrance on his journey, ſees ſeveral ways before him, and perhaps moſt of them appear ſmooth and pleaſant; and therefore being ſtruck with the firſt appearance, and not knowing what is to come, he is in great danger of ſteping into the wrong path directly, without giving himſelf any further trouble; and thus may ſet out undeſignedly towards deſtruction. Tho' indeed this ignorance is far from being altogether excuſable, becauſe there is the long-repeated experience of others, and their frequent warnings and counſils, declaring what will unavoidably be the conſequence if they begin in ſuch a particular courſe; which might be ſufficient

* Prov. xii. 28.

cient caution if duly regarded. But yet the knowing only by hearſay, and not having been ſenſible of the evil themſelves, and the vain imagination that, however others may have ſuffered, they may ſucceed better, and ſecure at leaſt a comfortable retreat; theſe things are very great temptations to them, after all, to truſt chiefly to their own fancies, and to *walk in the ways of their heart, and in the ſight of their eyes.*

And then this danger further ariſes from the eagerneſs of temper, the ſtrength of paſſion and inclination, and eſpecially the love of pleaſure, which are found in us when we are young. We are apt to be impatient of reſtraint, and as ſoon as ever we come to feel and reliſh our exiſtence, are for ruſhing on, in the firſt agreable path that preſents itſelf, to ſhow our liberty, without conſidering what we may meet with in the long run. Our paſſions alſo are ſtrong and impetuous, and the exerciſe of them being conſiderably older than that of reaſon, they have a ſtronger hold and influence; and, if not more than ordinarily guarded and watched, carry down the mind and heart into hurtful ways before we are well aware.

Add to this alſo, that there are temptations peculiarly ſuited to entangle the young, and draw them into theſe bad and dangerous ways. There are ſuch as are eminently ſtiled * *youthful luſts*, which thus *war againſt the ſoul*; ſuch as the *luſts of the fleſh*, ſenſual indulgences, which ſadly defile the heart; together with the gay ſcenes of conſtant pleaſure and vain delights. Theſe temptations are moſt apt to ſucceed, as they ariſe from the ſtrong influence of ſenſible objects which ſtrike the fancy and imagination in a moſt agreable manner, and ſo influence the affections and paſſions of the ſoul; and for one that eſcapes, there

* 2 Tim. ii. 22.

there are a hundred that are led aſide by them. Nor is it to be doubted, but that the great enemy of ſouls may ſo direct and diſpoſe theſe youthful ſnares, and offer them at ſuch particular ſeaſons and periods, as may be moſt likely to gain his deſired advantage over them.

This then ſeems plainly ſuggeſted to us in our text, that there are many bad and fatal ways in this preſent world, and that the young, eſpecially, are in great danger of falling into them.

2. It is alſo here, in this inquiry in my text, plainly ſuggeſted that the young have peculiar need of counſil and direction how they may ſhun theſe fatal paths, and keep off from danger.

And here the ſame arguments which prove the young moſt expoſed to theſe ſnares and temptations, at the ſame time evince the peculiar neceſſity of counſil and direction to perſons in their circumſtances. Their inability and unſkilfulneſs, thoroughly to direct themſelves, is one. What the Prophet ſays in another caſe, of the children of men in general, is peculiarly applicable to us when young, and begining life; * *Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himſelf; it is not in man that walketh to direct his ſteps.* We are, in a great meaſure, at ſuch a ſeaſon, ignorant of ourſelves, as well as the world about us, and of futurity; and therefore have ſpecial occaſion for ſome kind and wiſe and faithful counſillor. Eſpecially too if we conſider that there are ſo many deceitful and bad guides and counſillors lying in wait to pervert the young; not only corrupt and ſtrong appetites and paſſions, that importunately ſolicit to a full and unbounded gratification of them; not only ſpiritual enemies, but wicked men

* Jerem. x. 23.

men alſo, who have gone off from the cauſe of piety and virtue themſelves, or never engaged in it, and are deſirous to ſeduce others into the road to deſtruction for company. Theſe will uſe the moſt inſinuating and unwearied arts and practices, to allure and perſwade them to take up their lot with them. So that if there is not ſome kind director to ſhow the young the fallacy of ſuch adviſers, and detect the ſnare, and thus engage them to refuſe a compliance, they are often at once made the prize and the triumph of thoſe who by cuning craftineſs lie in wait to deceive them, and are quite turned out of the path of life.

3. This queſtion in my text may, without any force, be ſuppoſed to intimate a holy care and ſolicitude to eſcape theſe dangerous paths; and an earneſt deſire to obtain this wiſe and only ſafe guidance and direction for ſo valuable and important a purpoſe.

Wherewith ſhall a young Man cleanſe his way? "Since the world, thro' which I am to paſs, is "ſo degenerate and corrupt; and ſince I am "raw and unexperienced, and ignorant of the "many bye and dangerous paths which lie in it, "and am ſo much the more likely to be deceiv-"ed; ſince I have ſo many endeavouring to di-"vert my courſe, and my paſſions are loud and "importunate; ſince I am thus encompaſſed with "infirmities and temptations, and am like to run "ſuch a deſperate hazard, I am exceedingly con-"cerned how to ſet out, where to tread, that, if "poſſible, I may eſcape the paths of the deſtroyer. "I wiſh, above all things, for ſome certain un-"erring counſil and guidance. O where ſhall I "find it! Wherewith ſhall I have knowledge,

"and

" and ſtrength, and aſſiſtance, ſufficient to keep " me free from pollution in my journey, to pre- " ſerve my heart and my feet clean and ſteady in " the way? If I obtain this direction I am in " a fair way to be happy; but without it ſhall " be bewildered, loſt, and ſunk into miſery and " ruin. *O Lord, I know not what to do, but my* " *eyes are up unto thee; O teach me in the way that* " *I ſhould go!*"

But then, on the other hand, this part of my text may be ſuppoſed to refer to the young, not only at their firſt ſeting out in life, but afterwards, if they have ſet out wrong. *Wherewith ſhall a young man cleanſe his way?* " How ſhall he, that has " made a falſe ſtep at the begining, recover from " whence he is fallen? How ſhall he cleanſe him- " ſelf from the pollutions and defilements of his " paſt youthful ſins, and turn back to the true " path of life, before he is grown old in vice?" Now the words, taken in this ſenſe, intimate

That tho' ſuch a falſe and unhappy ſeting out is very bad, yet the caſe is not deſperate; nor is the youth irrecoverably gone. Perhaps, thro' the force of paſſion, and corrupt inclinations, he has turned aſide from the holy Commandments, forgotten the Law of his God, and has been entangled and overcome by ſome youthful luſts. But ſtill he is not yet quite loſt to the power of conſcience, but rather is grieved and ſhocked at his conduct; and yet at a loſs what way to take to recover himſelf from the ſnares of the devil. Now *wherewith ſhall* ſuch a one *cleanſe his way?* Is he paſt hopes? And is there no remedy, but, having once plunged, muſt he ſink for ever? No, ſurely, there is ſome method for his reſtoration to the paths of righteouſneſs; where, and how ſhall it be obtained? But then alſo,

It intimates the great danger of proceeding in the paths of ſin to endleſs ruin, without a return; and the neceſſity of a ſpeedy aſſiſtance to this end and purpoſe. "Wherewith ſhall he recover and "be reſtored? He is now at a pauſe; and if he "ſhould not now turn off, and cleanſe his courſe, "he will be tempted to return to folly again, "and ſtifle the remonſtrances of reaſon and con-"ſcience, by going deeper in the ways of tranſ-"greſſors, and ſo periſh entirely from the way "of righteouſneſs. It is of the higheſt impor-"tance therefore to obtain this direction and guid-"ance, to learn how to purify himſelf from this "filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, which he has con-"tracted; that ſo he may walk on in the fear "of God, and in the way of truth and holi-"neſs."

Thus have I conſidered diſtinctly the inquiry in my text, which was the firſt head of diſcourſe. We have ſeen the import of it as it may be underſtood of directing the way of youth in their firſt entrance on life, that ſo they may eſcape the pollutions that are in the world, and keep themſelves in a good degree clean from moral defilements; and then as to the way and method of cleanſing themſelves from ſin and vice, if they ſhould have been ſo unhappy as to have ſteped aſide into them. And as I doubt not but you eſteem this inquiry of the utmoſt importance, ſo you are by this time ready for the next general, which is

II. To offer to your conſideration the ſerious and judicious anſwer. *Wherewith ſhall a young Man cleanſe his way? By taking heed thereto, according to thy Word.*

The word of God here, *i. e.* the revelation of the divine will for the government of ſuch creatures

tures as we are, is propoſed as the only proper and ſuitable means for this very important purpoſe. And it will appear ſo to every attentive mind, conſidered in general as the word of the moſt high God, the poſſeſſor of heaven and earth; and as ſuch having a right to order and command his creatures, and herein publiſhing his commands, which require ſtrict obedience to him, and the practice of univerſal righteouſneſs and holineſs, as the only way to obtain eternal life and happineſs. And what more proper than that the Law of the Creator ſhould influence and direct the conduct of his creatures? What more ſuitable than ſuch a diſcovery as his word, to keep them from living at random, and without controll?

But we may, in a more particular and diſtinct view, conſider this word of God as being peculiarly adapted to enable the young to cleanſe their way. Here then we may take notice of the tendency of the word of God to this very uſeful and beneficial end; and the way by which the young are to receive this benefit from it, and that is, by taking heed to their ways, to direct them according to this word.

1. Let us conſider the tendency which the word of God has to engage the young to cleanſe their ways, in both the ſenſes already mentioned, *viz.* as to directing their firſt ſeting out in the world; or recovering them from the ſnares and pollutions of vice afterwards.

The word of God then is peculiarly ſuited to guide and counſil the young in their firſt ſeting out in life, ſo as that they may take the right courſe, and eſcape the paths of the deſtroyer. This it does, by pointing out, in the plaineſt and cleareſt manner, the only ſafe path, and deſcribing the

dangers of all others, ſo as that they may be underſtood beforehand; as well as by laying down thoſe rules which will ſerve to keep them free from the temptations that aſſault them afterwards, and are moſt likely to be ſucceſsful.

The word of God points out the road to the doubtful youth ſeting out in life, and like a voice behind him does as it were ſay, *this is the way, walk in it.* To this end it declares that * *wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to deſtruction*; and that therefore he is not to chuſe it, becauſe of the apparent breadth and ſmoothneſs of it, nor becauſe of the multitude of gay ſprightly company that he beholds crowding into it. And, on the other hand, it declares that *ſtrait is the gate*, and *narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it.* But then it repreſents this as the only ſafe way; and aſſures him, that by delivering himſelf up to divine wiſdom and the fear of the Lord, and in the exerciſe of religion, he will find it a way of pleaſantneſs and peace. Thus the word of God is a *light to his feet, and a lamp to his path*; like the *cloud by day*, and the *pillar of fire by night*, which ſet out with the Iſraelites, and went before them as a guard and guide through the wilderneſs, to keep them free from dangerous wanderings and fatal paths.

Again, the word of God is eminently ſerviceable to direct the young in their paſſage, as it deſcribes particularly the ſnares and dangers that lie in their way, and gives ſpecial rules for the eſcaping them.

Particularly, it warns them of evil company, repreſents the enſnaring deceitful arts which they practiſe on the young; ſets forth the eaſy progreſs of ſin by yielding to their ſolicitations, and ſo cautions them againſt it with the greateſt ſeriouſneſs

* Matt. vii. 13, 14.

neſs and earneſtneſs. Here divine wiſdom ſpeaks to the unexperienced youth, like the moſt affectionate Father to his favourite child, * *My Son, if ſiners entice thee, conſent thou not. If they ſay, come with us, caſt in thy lot among us, we ſhall find all precious ſubſtance. My Son, go not thou in the way with them, but refrain thy foot from their path.* Again, † *He that followeth after vain perſons ſhall have poverty enough.* ‡ *He that walketh with wiſe men ſhall be wiſe; but a companion of fools ſhall be deſtroyed.* Bleſſed therefore, and only truly happy, is that man who ſhuns ſuch ſociety, who never ſo much as ‖ *walks in the counſil of the ungodly*, leſt he come, by degrees, to *ſtand in the way of ſiners*; and at length to *ſit in the ſeat of the ſcornful.*

Again, the word of God is particularly leveled againſt youthful luſts; ſuch as the luſt of uncleanneſs, or the indulgence to ſenſuality. I am ſorry to ſay it, but it is too true, that this kind of vice ſeems to abound more among our youth than ever; nay even among thoſe, who in ſome companies may talk a great deal about virtue, and benevolence, and a fine conduct. Now adays a violation of chaſtity, if not reckoned a piece of heroiſm, is at moſt eſteemed only a gay frolick, very excuſable in a ſprightly temper; and he paſſes for a pretty ſober man who gets up decently out of only one debauch, and appears with a calm and ſedate countenance afterwards. As if the word of God had allowed the indulgence, and given a diſpenſation to the young to excuſe them in their vile gratifications. Whereas God, who knows our frame, and the peculiar proneneſs of the young to ſenſual pleaſure, has, on the contrary, laid the ſtricteſt injunction on them to watchful-

* Prov. i. 10, 11, 14, 15. † xxviii. 19.
‡ xiii. 20. ‖ Pſal. i. 1.

neſs, and to reſiſt ſuch temptations; and has guarded the paſſage to theſe vices, with ſuch awful repreſentations of the folly, the danger, and the miſery that will enſue, and ſuch peculiar threatenings, as ſhould be enough to chill the moſt inflamed and raging paſſions, and ſtop the moſt reſolved ſiner in the full heat of his progreſs.

As a proof of this I might mention ſeveral paſſages of ſcripture; but for the preſent ſhall only obſerve, that the begining of the book of *Proverbs*, the later end of the 2d chapter, the 4th, 5th, and part of the 6th and 7th chapters, give a moſt affecting deſcription of the progreſs of this vice; how, by indulging wandering eyes and inclinations, the enemy enters in at the windows, and ſo ſets on fire the whole ſoul; they lay open the artful inſinuations and fair ſpeeches of the lewd harlot; and deſcribe the youth following the enchantment as the object of contempt and ſcorn. * *He goeth after her as an ox goeth to the ſlaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the ſtocks; till a dart ſtrike through his liver, as a bird haſteth to the ſnare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.* And then theſe ſcriptures ſet forth the miſery of ſuch unhappy creatures in the end; the tendency of ſuch indulgences to ſtupify the ſoul, and keep it for ever out of the path of life, and to conſume and ruin the body and eſtate, as well as to bring down upon them the ſolemn denunciations of an angry God. I ſay all theſe things are ſo ſtrongly repreſented in theſe chapters, as is enough to break all the force of a hurtful temptation, and engage every young perſon to a chaſte and ſtrictly virtuous life; and to that end, to yield to the entreaties contained therein; and eſpecially to obſerve that fundamental rule, † *to keep the heart with*

* Prov. vii. 22, &c. † Chap. iv. 23.

with all diligence, becauſe out of it are the iſſues of life.

And then the rules and precepts of the goſpel are very expreſs and ſtrict in this reſpect. They not only forbid criminal exceſſes and ſenſual gratifications, but alſo all * *filthineſs, and fooliſh talking, and jeſting, as not convenient*; nay, they forbid a laſcivious look, and an impure heart; while the obſervation of theſe precepts is enforced with the ſtrong and awful motives peculiar to this laſt and moſt excellent diſpenſation of God to mankind.

I might alſo mention intemperance as another youthful vice which the word of God has made ſpecial proviſion againſt, and directs the young how to avoid. Not to inſtance in others, thoſe two places in the book of *Proverbs* ſhall be ſufficient. † *Be not among wine-bibbers, among riotous eaters of fleſh; for the drunkard and the glutton ſhall come to poverty.* ‡ *My Son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes obſerve my ways. Who hath woe? Who hath ſorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babblings? Who hath wounds without cauſe? Who hath redneſs of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine, they that go to ſeek mixed wine.* As ever then thou wouldeſt avoid the ſad effects of intemperance, guard againſt the firſt approaches to it. *Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itſelf aright. At the laſt it biteth like a ſerpent, and ſtingeth like an adder. Thine eyes ſhall behold ſtrange women, and thine heart ſhall utter perverſe things. Yea, thou ſhalt be as one that lieth down in the midſt of the ſea, or as he that lieth on the top of a maſt.* So that you ſee here intemperance

* Eph. v. 4. † Prov. xxiii. 20, 21. ‡ Ver. 26, 29, &c.

perance is cautioned againſt, not only as a real evil in itſelf, but as leading on to the height of vice and debauchery.

I might alſo mention the vanity, the love of pleaſure, the pride and ſelf-conceit, which are ſo common to us when young; and quote particular paſſages of ſcripture, to ſhow how we are expreſsly guarded againſt them; which are ſo many, and ſo various, as are enough to repreſs the moſt eager deſires, and giddy expectations, and command a youthful ſpirit to a becoming manly gravity, humility, and ſerioufneſs, and turn it to the pleaſures of religion and virtue, as the moſt ſatisfactory and delightful. But this would prolong my diſcourſe too much. I only therefore obſerve further,

That the word of God is as proper and ſuitable to teach the young how *to cleanſe their way*, if they have ſteped into the paths of vice, as to ſet them right on their journey at firſt. It is ſo, as it ſets before them the unſpeakable danger of continuing in ſuch a courſe; diſplays the terrors of the Lord, lays death naked before them, and removes the covering from everlaſting deſtruction; and ſo alarms their ſtupified conſciences, and ſhows them the evil and reproachfulneſs of youthful follies; points out that repentance that is proper to reſtore them from ſining, and the acceptableneſs of that repentance, eſpecially now under the goſpel, through a Mediator. It repreſents the eaſineſs of turning to God now, in compariſon of what it will be after a long continuance in ſin; God's readineſs to reſtore and heal them, and his deſigning both mercies and corrections to this end.

Inſtead of enumerating many ſcriptures, I ſhall only mention the caſe of *Ephraim*, as admirably ſuited to expreſs the remorſe and ſorrow of a young

ſiner

ſiner at the remembrance of his folly, and to direct and guide ſuch an one in his recovery from ſin, eſpecially, if he ſhould be brought into affliction by his vices; and to convince him of the readineſs of God to reſtore him upon his ſincere repentance. * *I have ſurely heard Ephraim bemoaning himſelf thus, Thou haſt chaſtiſed me, and I was chaſtiſed, as a bullock unaccuſtomed to the yoke. Turn thou me, and I ſhall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God. Surely, after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was inſtructed, I ſmote upon my thigh: I was aſhamed, yea even confounded, becauſe I did bear the reproach of my youth.* And the following verſes exhibit the meltings of divine mercy and compaſſion toward him on this return. The parable of the prodigal Son alſo, without any violence to the original deſign of it, is full of the moſt beautiful and ſtrong inſtructions to the ſame purpoſe.

This admirable tendency hath the word of God, to direct the young to cleanſe their way. And

2. This leads me to obſerve the method preſcribed for young perſons to receive this benefit by it, that is, by taking heed to govern their ways according to this word, by laying it before them as their rule, keeping it conſtantly in their view, and endeavouring to treaſure it up in their hearts, and practiſe it in their lives.

And I ſhall enlarge on this particular in a ſerious exhortation to them all, as what I apprehend the moſt proper application of the ſubject.

Accordingly, as the words have been conſidered in a double view, my exhortation will properly reſpect two different ſorts of young perſons.

1. Let

* Jer. xxxi. 18, &c.

1. Let me addreſs myſelf to thoſe youth that have hitherto eſcaped the ſnares of vice, and exhort them to a ſpecial regard to the word of God, as their beſt director and counſellor for future life.

One year after another, as it adds conſiderably to the number of your days, and the encreaſe of your ſtature, inſenſibly brings you more into converſe with the world, and to engage in the company, the buſineſs, and the amuſements of it. And though hitherto, in the narrow circle of the family, or the confinements even of a ſchool, you may have behaved well, yet now your proſpect widens, and your temptations are greater. As ever then you would ſet out well for after-life, and hold on to the end, take the word of God with you as your beſt ſecurity and defence.

I apprehend ſuch a direction peculiarly needful in the preſent age, when it is become the faſhion with many of our young gentry, and polite citizens, to imagine that they commence men in proportion to their diſregard to their Bibles. To talk to them about the rule of the word of God is a great affront, at leaſt very ill manners. It was a Book they read when children, and ſerved well enough then, either to frighten or allure them to do what their Parents would have them, but now they think it high time to put away ſuch childiſh things; if not to ſpend their leiſure hours in a laborious endeavour to repreſent the ſcriptures either as inconſiſtent or fabulous. And thus, under pretence of giving themſelves up to reaſon and moral philoſophy, in oppoſition to the ſcriptures, they become indeed free from the reſtraints of righteouſneſs; but they at the ſame time go into a worſe ſervice, even that of ſin. As ever then

you

you would eſcape ſuch a ſnare under the appearance of wit and wiſdom, inſtead of laying aſide this ſacred Book, let it be your conſtant companion. * *Let your delight be in the Law of the Lord, and in that Law meditate day and night.*

I believe I am ſpeaking to many of you who have been ſo happy as *from children to have known the holy ſcriptures*; I beg you would not forſake them, becauſe they are ſaid to be † *able to make you wiſe to ſalvation.* Surely, as they claim this advantage (above all writings of arts and ſciences) it is very well worth while to run the venture, by adhering to their rules, whether they will ſecure this ſalvation at laſt or not; becauſe if they do not, you will not be at all worſe off than thoſe who have rejected them; but if they do, you can only be ſafe by them; and by rejecting them you cut yourſelves off from the only means of happineſs, you will periſh with unſpeakable ſelf-upbraidings, and be branded for everlaſting fools.

Suffer then the word of exhortation; and as this following year will certainly bring with it its ſnares and additional temptations, be fortified with this ‖ *ſword of the ſpirit which is the word of God.* Endeavour to treaſure up in your minds thoſe portions of ſcripture which are moſt directly levelled againſt youthful luſts; and particularly thoſe mentioned in the *Proverbs*, which I have heard perſons confeſs have been of peculiar advantage to them in a ſeaſon of trial. And then be ſolicitous to treaſure them up in your memories, not as matter of mere ſpeculation, or to ſhew only the ſtrength of your faculties, but for practical purpoſes. *So ſhall you find favour, and good underſtanding in the ſight of God and man.* And, with ſuch honeſt and upright endeavours, be ſolicitous alſo

* Pſal. i. 2. † 2 Tim. iii. 15. ‖ Eph. vi. 17.

alſo to join that prayer which immediately follows my text, * *With my whole heart have I ſought thee; O let me not wander from thy Commandments!*

2. I have now done when I have only added one word of addreſs to thoſe who have, in their youth, turned aſide from the holy Commandment.

And, if there ſhould be any ſuch here, my exhortation to them is to *cleanſe their way, by taking heed thereto according to God's word.* Come back again to the ſtandard, *to the Law, and to the Teſtimony*, and compare your conduct with that; tho', by diſcovering the irregularity and evil of your ways, it makes work for bitter repentance. Do not think that you can be ſafe, or upon the whole eaſier, by going on in a courſe of ſin; but reſolve to come out of the dangerous road, and return to the right path; there is no being ſafe otherwiſe. If the laſt year ſhould have been witneſs to the firſt ſad ſtep in the ways of vice with any of you, O do not plunge on thro' another year alſo, but make a ſtand. Be convinced of your ingratitude and wickedneſs, be perſwaded it is eaſier for you to recover now, than when you are ſunk deep in the mire; and that whatever remorſe you may feel it will be well repaid by a timely repentance now, or unſpeakably increaſed by a dreadful progreſs. And let this new year's day witneſs, that you † *think on your ways, and turn your feet unto God's Teſtimonies*; and that from henceforward *you make haſte and delay not to keep his righteous Judgments.* And then you may put up that penitential prayer with the Pſalmiſt, ‡ *I have gone aſtray like a loſt ſheep; ſeek thy ſervant, for I do not forget thy Commandments.*

* Pſal. cxix. 10. † cxix. 59, 60. ‡ Ver. 176.

SERMON

SERMON VI.

God remembers the Kindneſs of our Youth.

JEREMIAH II. 2.

Thus ſaith the Lord, I remember thee, the Kindneſs of thy Youth.

IT is obſerved * "to have been a "common metaphor uſed by this "Prophet *Jeremiah*, and *Ezekiel* "who was nearly his cotemporary, "to conſider the people of *Iſrael*, "as if, in their ſucceſſive generations, they made "but one perſon paſſing through different ages "and periods of life. The courſe of God's Pro- "vidence towards them, and their behaviour to- "wards God through one age after another, are "often expreſſed in terms which carry an allu- "ſion to the ſeveral ages of man's life. You "may purſue this metaphor through a conſide- "rable part of the ſixteenth chapter of *Ezekiel's* "prophecy. The ſtory of their nation there, is "related in the manner one would deſcribe the "life of a ſingle perſon from his birth till he ar- "rive at maturity. They are traced up to their

* See Dr. *Evans's* Sermons to Young People. Sermon I. page 2.

" progenitors. Their weak and low eſtate, at " the begining of their people, is ſet forth by " the helpleſs condition of a new-born infant; " and God's kindneſs towards them, in thoſe " early days, by the care and kindneſs of a ten- " der Father making all ſuitable proviſions for " his Child, and following him with a watchful " eye, and a bountiful hand, till he comes to " maturity."

In like manner the Prophet Jeremiah repreſents this people, in this and the following chapter. And here, when he begins his moving expoſtulations with them, upon account of a moſt ungrateful revolt and idolatry, he puts them in mind of his kindneſs to their anceſtors, and their virtuous and dutiful regard, by expreſſing himſelf thus, *as remembering the kindneſs of their youth. Go and cry* (ſays God to his Prophet) *in the ears of Jeruſalem, ſaying, Thus ſaith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindneſs of thy youth, the love of thine eſpouſals, when thou wenteſt after me in a land that was not ſown.* I know the generality of Commentators incline rather to refer this expreſſion to the kindneſs which God ſhewed to them, in their early ſtate, than to the obedience of their anceſtors to him. But, as I apprehend the words will as well bear this latter rendering, as the former, we have no reaſon to exclude it as foreign to the deſign of the Prophet, ſince it will rather enforce his expoſtulation in the ſtrongeſt manner. He puts them in mind of his own kindneſs to them from the begining, from their firſt coming out of *Egypt*, and his ſpecial care of them in the wilderneſs; and at the ſame time lets them know he remembers that they ſet out well, and how acceptable that early obedience was to him; when he eſteemed it as the *kindneſs of their youth.* And, from both theſe conſiderations together, he repreſents to them,

them, in the moſt ſtriking manner, the aggravated evil and ingratitude of their preſent defection and apoſtaſy.

But I imagine I ſhall do no injury to the words if I take them ſeparately from the context, and accommodate them to young people in general; as a condeſcending call of God to them, to reflect on the ſpecial favours and mercies they have received from him in early life; as intimating his ſpecial regard and approbation of thoſe who have been perſuaded in early life by theſe favours and mercies to devote themſelves to his ſervice; and as a moſt powerful and affecting call to thoſe to return back again to ſuch a God, who have gone aſtray, and forſaken him after promiſing beginings. Let us then attend to the enlargement on the words under theſe views, which will lead us to a profitable improvement of them.

I. We may conſider the words as a ſolemn call from God to youth in general, to reflect on thoſe ſpecial favours and mercies which he vouchſafes to them in early life. *I remember thee, the kindneſs of thy youth.* "I remember "my kindneſs to thee from the begining of "thy life hitherto." This ſenſe of the words may intimate theſe things to us.

1. That there are ſeveral inſtances of the divine goodneſs and favour which are peculiarly ſuited to our early life, and the ſeaſon of our youth.

2. That theſe inſtances of goodneſs are vouchſafed by God, with an eminently kind deſign to the young.

3. That God takes particular notice what effect theſe diſplays of his kindneſs in that ſeaſon have upon a youthful mind.

" *I remember thee, the kindneſs of thy youth*, all " the ways of my mercy to thee from the firſt; " and have ſeen all along what influence they " have had upon thee."

1. In this view of the words, we may conſider them as intimating this truth. That there are inſtances of the divine goodneſs and favour vouchſafed to young perſons, peculiarly ſuited to that early age of life.

* *God* indeed *is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.* Every creature ſhares in the effects of that goodneſs, and eſpecially every reaſonable creature, but ſuch as by their miſconduct have utterly diſqualified themſelves to receive it; and all mankind experience the conſtant never failing ſupply of the divine bounty, from the begining of life, thro' every ſtage till the laſt and final cloſe of it here. In this reſpect it may be ſaid, † *day unto day uttereth ſpeech, and night unto night ſheweth knowledge.* The divine mercies are freſh with every returning morning, and renewed every evening, while each returning *year is crowned with his goodneſs.* But ſtill, as every thing is moſt beautiful in its ſeaſon, the beauty, as well as wiſdom, of the divine goodneſs appears more conſpicuous in the various diſplays of it; not only as beſt ſuited to the changing ſeaſons of the year in the natural world, but alſo to the different ages and ſtates of mankind. We are now to attend particularly to thoſe inſtances of it which are vouchſafed to us in early life.

And

* Pſal. cxlv. 9. † Pſal. xix. 3.

And here I might begin at our firſt appearance in the world, when we come into it in great hazard and peril, and fall a weeping, helpleſs, defenceleſs offspring upon the care and charge of divine Providence. I might here alſo mention the ſpecial tenderneſs and affection of Parents, which in a particular manner ſuits and accommodates itſelf to the weakneſs and wants of that firſt ſtate, all the time *that the knees prevent us:* I might, I ſay, mention this alſo, as a ſpecial Inſtance of the goodneſs of God, the original Parent, * *who pities us, like as a Father pities his Children*; who appointed the near relation between Parents and Children, and planted in the former all thoſe ſoft and delicate paſſions, which flow out in a manner ſo proper for the care and ſupport of the helpleſs infant; as well as provided for its nouriſhment from that perſon which was the inſtrument of its being. † *Out of the mouth of babes and ſucklings, O Lord, thou ordaineſt ſtrength,* and doſt *perfect* thy *praiſe!* I might ſpeak of the ſpecial goodneſs of God in healing the diſeaſes of infant-nature, as it diſcovers perhaps the more immediate working and direction of Providence, when the poor feeble creature is not capable of telling you what its complaints are, and can only utter its diſtreſs by crying and tears; while the hearts of the fond Parents are filled with aggravated ſorrow, by beholding their own tender offspring in anguiſh and pain, and finding themſelves unable to adminiſter eaſe and relief to them, or to procure it from others. I might alſo mention the ſpecial goodneſs of God in preſerving us in the next ſtage, when infancy ſlides into childhood; a ſtate this, which, while it ſhows their offspring more agreable, and ſtrengthens the Parents affection, encreaſes their fears too, as it leaves them more

* Pſal. ciii. 13. † Pſal. viii. 2.

expoſed. What the poor man ſaid of his Son that was a lunatick, to our Saviour, in order to move his compaſſion, (**Lord, have mercy on my Son, for often times he falleth into the fire, and often into the water*) is often literally true as to little Children. When they firſt begin to totter about, with ſhort and weak and feeble ſteps, to what innumerable evils are they expoſed? And were it not for the ever-watchful eye and guarding hand of God, their heavenly Father, more watchful and defending than the moſt careful eye and hand of the fondeſt earthly Parent, how would they be *cruſhed before the moth!* And how remarkable are the frequent appearances of Providence in their behalf, in reſcuing them in the very article of danger, when ſo often there is ſcarce a ſtep between them and death!

As the Child grows up in life, the diſpenſations of mercy and goodneſs are ſtill continued, and encreaſed too with an agreable variety; eſpecially as he comes to that age, which is more properly diſtinguiſhed by the name of youth. This is often evident in the ſpecial interpoſures of God's Providence at their firſt ſeting out; over-ruling the mind as to particular buſineſs and employments; and ſometimes, perhaps, by ſtrengthening and encouraging the inclination to that in which they may be moſt comfortable and uſeful hereafter; thus fixing them at firſt for all future life, and opening a way for their being placed in ſuch families, and in ſuch circumſtances, as may be moſt ſuitable and happy for them if they will but heedfully regard ſuch heavenly guidance; as well as by frequently throwing ſuch hints in their way, as may ſerve, if duly heeded, effectually to guard their early virtue, to engage them to flee youthful luſts, and ſo eſcape the paths of the deſtroyer. Some or other of

* Matt. xvii. 15.

of theſe inſtances of divine goodneſs are what all young perſons are favoured with, as they are peculiarly ſuited to ſuch; as well as with early convictions of ſin and duty, of the obligations to a Deity, and the practice of religion, and of the fitneſs, the propriety, and reaſonableneſs of the ſervice. And I believe there is none of us here, that have grown up to maturity, but, upon a ſerious review of our paſt lives, can witneſs to the truth of what I have been pleading for, and can ſtand forth each as a living proof from their youth of a particular Providence. One, perhaps, ſhall be able to tell us, when he was to go firſt out in the world from under the parental eye, he was either remarkably prevented from fixing in ſuch an employment, which he now finds he ſhould not have been fit for, or which would have been a ſnare to him; or elſe that he was, by a ſtronger impreſſion on his mind, and turn of ſober inclination, as ſtrangly led to another, which he has found to be the beſt and moſt proper for him. An other can ſay, how by, caſually as he thought, falling into ſome acquaintance and company, his feet have been held up in the ways of piety during the ſlippery paths of youth, and he has been eſtabliſhed for growing virtue. And a third may be able to tell us, how, having his lot caſt, by ſome ſpecial ſeeming accident, into ſuch a particular family, he has been made both for this world and an other.

I only add, that as to ſome there are ſpecial inſtances of goodneſs manifeſted from their firſt entrance on the world, by which they have eminent advantages in early life for religion and virtue, and making a diſtinguiſhing progreſs in a courſe of piety in growing years. And theſe are, when God cauſes perſons to be born of wiſe and religious Parents, who begin in the moſt early ſeaſon

with

with good inſtructions and education; and take care to give the firſt turn and direction of the mind to God and heaven, before it has contracted a wrong biaſs, and been warped by evil cuſtom, indulgence, and bad example; when holineſs to the Lord is writen upon them from their being firſt ſolemnly devoted to him; and the Parents take care to affect them as ſoon as poſſible with a ſenſe of their obligations to cultivate and cheriſh perſonal holineſs, to devote themſelves to God betimes, and ſo to endeavour to perfect holineſs in this fear. When with all the holy violence of fervent prayer, joined with their good example and inſtruction, they are ſolicitous to draw down * *the Spirit of God upon their ſeed, and his bleſſing upon their offspring.* And if any of us have deſcended from ſuch Parents, we are to reckon this as a diſtinguiſhing inſtance of God's goodneſs to us. And this leads me to obſerve,

2. That all theſe inſtances of God's goodneſs are vouchſafed with a peculiarly kind deſign to young perſons; they are God's *kindneſs to our youth.*

They are ſo, conſidered only as marks of tender care and compaſſion to ſuch creatures ſo far beneath him. That he who *is the high and lofty one that inhabits eternity*, and the *everlaſting God*, ſhould take ſuch notice of and pay ſuch regards to us, as if we were the only dependants on his Providence! That he ſhould ſtoop ſo low as to accommodate himſelf to the weakneſſes and wants of our frail and feeble nature, and from the very firſt moment of our being *prevent us with the bleſſings of his goodneſs!* That his hand ſhould ſhower down unnumbered daily mercies, before we were capable

* Iſa. xlv. 3.

capable of telling from whom thoſe mercies flowed; and that the ſtream ſhould riſe and ſwell, inſtead of falling, with growing years! How juſtly may we cry out with the Pſalmiſt, * *Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the Son of man,* that poor feeble creature, *that thou ſhouldſt viſit him?*

But then, if we conſider theſe inſtances of divine goodneſs to us in early life as calculated for promoting our trueſt happineſs, they intimate an eminently kind deſign indeed. And this is all that the ever-bleſſed God aims at. It was for this end that he gave us being that he might communicate happineſs to us; and to this end he has given ſuch a being that he might communicate a ſuperior kind and degree of happineſs to us. And for this it is he upholds our ſouls in life here, from the firſt, that we may in this life improve our capacities for it, and at laſt by a courſe of virtue obtain it as properly our own. For this end does the goodneſs of God reach down to us, that we may be led up to the compleat and perfect enjoyment of that in heaven. With this view is all the kindneſs and long-ſuffering of his Providence vouchſafed, that we may be ſpared in order to promote our own felicity. For this end are all the directions and diſpoſals of his Providence in early life, and the bleſſings of Grace too, to engage the tender mind at its firſt opening to look to God, to yield itſelf to him, and act for him who claims our firſt ſervice and devotion, not for his own ſake, (for man can never be profitable to God) but for ours. His mercies to us, as our Creator and our helper in the tendereſt age, are to engage us to *remember him our Creator in the days of our youth*; and therefore to remember him, that we may ſecure a title to his favour and bleſſing betimes.

Nay,

* Pſal. viii. 4.

Nay, I might add, when he thinks it moſt proper to viſit the young with early afflictions too, it is with the ſame kind deſign, to keep us from thoſe youthful vanities into which otherwiſe we might be apt, from the turn of our particular tempers, to wander; to reſtrain the hurry of paſſion; to prevent ſuch excurſions, as might make work for bitter repentance hereafter; and ſo convince us, that it * *is good to bear the yoke in our youth*, by its making us to ſit alone and keep ſilence; and thus by bringing us under the rod, to bring us the ſooner under the bonds of the covenant. In theſe and various other ways does God work with men from early life for their good, their real benefit and advantage, and with a deſign to promote their true their everlaſting happineſs.

3. It is plainly intimated, in this view of the words, that God takes ſpecial notice, what effect theſe inſtances of goodneſs and kindneſs have upon young and tender minds.

Let us then conceive the words of my text as an addreſs to every young perſon this new year's day, puting them in mind of all the mercy and goodneſs of God toward them hitherto. "*Thus* "*ſaith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindneſs of* "*thy youth. I remember thee.* It was I that "brought thee into the world at firſt; thou waſt "*caſt upon me from the womb*, and I have been thy "God from thy birth hitherto. In infancy, it "was my hand, though unſeen, that upheld thee "when the knees prevented thee; and it was I that "*made thee to hope when thou didſt hang upon thy* "*Mother's breaſt.* It was I that held thee up in "childhood, and kept off ten thouſand dangers "which

* Lam. iii. 27, 28.

" which otherwiſe would have then overtaken
" thee, as well as ſurprizingly delivered thee from
" thoſe which did. I remember the kindneſs I
" have ſhown to thee in thy youth; how my Pro-
" vidence has all along directed thy doubtful ſteps
" where to tread; and led thee out into the wil-
" derneſs at firſt through ſuch difficulties, and in
" ſuch a way, as thou couldſt never have thought
" of. I remember how I ſent early convictions,
" and favoured thee with great advantages; how
" I ſpake to thee, and called after thee, by the
" counſils and inſtructions of Parents; how I have
" placed thee betimes under the miniſtrations of
" my word, and taught thee to know my Scrip-
" tures; and how ſometimes I viſited thee with
" early afflictions too. All theſe things I have
" done to thee; with all theſe inſtances of kind-
" neſs have I viſited thee, and crowned every
" growing year of thy life with ſuitable good-
" neſs unto this hour, and all with this deſign
" to win over thy youthful heart to my ways.
" This was the language in all. *My Son, give*
" *me thy heart*; and wilt *thou not from this*
" *time cry unto me, my Father, thou art the guide*
" *of my youth?* Thus with loving kindneſs have
" I drawn thee. And I have obſerved thy con-
" duct, whether thou haſt felt ſuch early impreſ-
" ſions by my early kindneſs as to engage thee
" to comply with the call, and ſeek me early;
" or whether that childhood and youth, which
" were vain in themſelves, thou haſt not rendered
" more vain, through thy neglect of me, and
" indulging to a giddy, thoughtleſs, and ſen-
" ſual behaviour. Thy ways, from the firſt ſtep
" thou haſt taken in life, have been before mine
" eyes, and *I have pondered all thy goings.*" I
now proceed to obſerve.

II. The

II. The words of the text may intimate God's ſpecial approbation of thoſe who are perſuaded by his kindneſs to devote themſelves to him in their youth. *I remember thee, the kindneſs of thy Youth.*

Here I ſhall only take notice of theſe two things.

1. This early regard to God is eminently acceptable and well-pleaſing to him. And therefore,

2. It will be an encouragement to the perſons themſelves, if they continue in the ways of piety, to hope for ſpecial favour from God in declining life, and in the hour of death too.

1. We may juſtly conclude, from this view of the text, that this early piety will be eminently acceptable and well-pleaſing to God.

This the manner of expreſſion intimates, and alſo the great honour that God puts upon it. He remembers the ſpecial regard that is paid to him from the young, and from them at the begining of life, and ſpeaks of it as an act of kindneſs done to himſelf. Let my young friends here make a ſhort pauſe, and conſider the amazing condeſcenſion of the eternal God, and ſuffer their hearts to feel the force of it. How ſurprizing the grace, that he, to whom the goodneſs of the higheſt angels cannot poſſibly extend, ſhould yet look down into our world, and intimate that he will eſteem the offering of a youthful heart, not only a welcome preſent, but as an act of kindneſs ſhown,

ſhown to him! How muſt your tender and gentle diſpoſitions be won upon by ſuch declarations! And how can you forbear falling down in the moſt grateful ſurrenders of yourſelves, and your lives to him! I might here particularly mention ſeveral reaſons why ſuch an early religion is ſo eminently acceptable to God, but as theſe things have been often enlarged on, I ſhall only juſt hint at two or three.

For inſtance, it argues the moſt proper temper and diſpoſition of the creature towards its Creator. For a man, after he has ſet out in life neglectful of God, and ſought happineſs any where, or every where, but in him, at laſt to return, looks as if he did not care to truſt his Maker firſt, but had a better opinion of any call of vanity, and was more ready to embrace other offers than the promiſes of a faithful God. But for a young perſon to begin with God from the firſt; and, from a perſuaſion of his goodneſs and fidelity to ſurrender to him before it ſteps into a wide unknown world, and entirely to yield itſelf to the direction of his Providence and guidance, this argues the moſt proper and becoming dependance, and the moſt grateful truſt.

If we conſider the words of my text in this view, we may underſtand the laſt part of the verſe in this manner; *I remember thee, the kindneſs of thy youth, when thou wenteſt after me, in a land that was not ſown.* Then *Iſrael was holineſs to the Lord.* i. e. God mentions it as a circumſtance remarkably pleaſing to him, that in the infancy of their nation, their early ſtate, they followed him out of *Egypt* into the wilderneſs; and implicitly truſted his guidance through that long and howling deſart, and became eminently *holineſs to the Lord.*

Again, ſuch early regards to God, and ſuch youthful piety, are peculiarly acceptable, as they diſcover the kind deſigns of God in his early goodneſs to them to have taken their proper effect in the moſt beautiful ſeaſon. For as his kind deſigns are for our happineſs, and directed with the utmoſt wiſdom, ſo the ſpeedy ſucceſs of them is obſerved with ſpecial approbation and delight.

Again, this early grateful return of piety to God is peculiarly acceptable to him becauſe ſo few in proportion make it. And, laſtly, becauſe ſuch are more likely to be remarkably ſerviceable in his cauſe, and be extenſively uſeful in the world. But, as theſe reaſons have been already hinted in other diſcourſes, I infer,

2. The manner of expreſſion in my text may intimate the peculiar encouragement which all ſuch have, if they continue on in the courſe of piety, to hope in God, and to draw near to him in every difficulty and diſtreſs in future life; particularly, in the approaches of old age, and at the hour of death.

Alas, with what heart can the man that has grown up forgetful of God, lived without him in the world, and been unmindful of all his mercies, with what heart can ſuch an one go to God, to aſk any thing of him for the future, when he has lived all his life long upon the divine mercy and goodneſs, and never has had the gratitude or even the honeſty to acknowledge them! And how can he expect that God ſhould be his ſupport in old age, whom he never cared to take for the guide of his youth? Nay, what much better has he to look for in that ſad evening than this, that, inſtead of light, *his feet* ſhould *ſtumble on the dark* moun-

mountains, and he ſink down hopeleſs into the grave?

But, on the other hand, what encouragement has the young ſaint, as he grows in goodneſs, to hope for favourable regards from God in all future time, and to find relief in every addreſs to him in time of trouble? When afflictions overtake him, and heavy trials come, that voice, that was formed to prayer and devotion from the begining of life, may with an humble confidence addreſs the throne of grace then, and find peace and ſecurity; while God ſhall, with a ſacred pleaſure, return an anſwer of peace. "*I remember thee*, "*the kindneſs of thy youth*, and thy young ſacra- "mental dedications; all my dealings with thee "are quite conſiſtent with covenant love; and "*as thy day is, ſo ſhall thy ſtrength be.*" What ſatisfaction will this afford in the advances of old age, and what ground to hope that God will not forſake the chriſtian then, but that, as he has remembered God from his youth, God will be the ſtay of his hoary head, and make that evening to be light about him! With what humble courage and importunity does the devout *Pſalmiſt* plead with that God to whom from his childhood he had been devoted, * *O Lord*, ſays he, *I am thy ſervant; truly I am thy ſervant, the ſon of thine handmaid!* And therefore, † *O God, thou who haſt taught me from my youth*, as hitherto *I have declared thy works, now alſo, when I am old and greyheaded, forſake me not, until I have ſhewed thy ſtrength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come! Caſt me not off in the time of old age; forſake me not when my ſtrength faileth.*

And then this may be ſuppoſed as the reviving anſwer, "*I remember thee, and the kindneſs of*

* Pſal. cxvi. 16. † Pſal. lxxi. 9, 17, 18,

" *thy youth.* * *Hearken therefore, even to your old* " *age I am he, and even to hoary hairs will I carry* " *you. I have made, I will bear, even I will carry* " *and deliver you.*"

And, O, what can equal the hope, the comfort, and joy of the aged chriſtian, when, after a life begun with God by early dedications, led in a ſteady courſe of regular uninterrupted goodneſs through all the changing ſcenes of time, and confirmed and eſtabliſhed with growing years and frequent exerciſes of devotion to the end, he comes upon his bed of death, and is juſt about to depart! While a ray of heaven opens upon him, to gild the valley of that dark ſhadow into which he is entering, and this voice animates him, " *I remember thee, the kindneſs of thy youth*; and " having *guided thee by my counſil, I will now lead* " *thee up to my glory.*"

And now may I not hope, by this time, you are all fully convinced of the excellency of early piety, and of the wiſdom of continuing in the practice of religion to the end of life when you have once begun? Let the youngeſt here, this day, capable of knowing and underſtanding what I ſpeak, be perſuaded to begin their life of reaſon with their life of religion. Let this be the happy day of their enquiring after God their Maker, and crying unto him, *My God, we would know thee*; that ſo out of the mouths even of children praiſe may aſcend to God, whoſe mercies are from everlaſting to everlaſting.

Let the youth here be perſuaded to adjourn their ſolemn fixing for this God no longer. If any of you are come into that age, and are entered into the world, before you have begun to walk with God, it is high time to chuſe one for your guide who is a better conductor, not only than your

* Iſa. xlvi. 4.

your own inclinations and paſſions, but even than your wiſeſt and moſt ſagacious mortal friends. If you are already fixed in families, in order to your future ſetling in the buſineſs of this world, is it not high time to fix yourſelves in the houſe and family of God, and to come under the bonds of his covenant in a public manner at a ſacramental Table? Surely this is your moſt reaſonable ſervice; and, as always the moſt reaſonable, ſo the earlier you ingage in it, the more fit and becoming, the more will ſuch a conduct approve itſelf to your unprejudiced minds. Do not then let another year paſs over your heads before you yield to the divine goodneſs, which has ſo long waited on you, but be perſuaded to comply with its kind deſigns. Conſider, if you ſhould ſtill delay, there will be another year of mercy in a great meaſure loſt upon you, which God remembers, and which will make the work ſtill more difficult for you to comply with.

But then, as I hope there are many here who have endeavoured in their meaſure to return the kindneſs of God to them, by yielding to the early attraction of his goodneſs, let them be quickened from this ſubject to hold on in a courſe of growing piety to the end of life. For conſider, that the reaſon for your growing piety ſtrengthens with your advancing years. Every returning year ſhould hold that heart ſtill faſter to God that has begun with him, becauſe his mercies are ſtill encreaſing. I hope therefore that this day finds ſuch of you attending here with this repeated reſolution, and if poſſible with a fuller ſpirit, "Nay, "but we will be the Lord's." O think whether it is not well worth your ſtudy, walking before God all the days of your life to the end, to have him remember you all your life long to the cloſe of it,

and, when fleſh and heart fail, then to be *the ſtrength of your heart, and your portion for ever!*

But if after all there ſhould be any here who, after they have begun with God, have departed from him, or at leaſt neglected him, my ſubject may be underſtood as relating to them. And in this view I ſhall cloſe it.

III. As it contains a moſt powerful motive to ſuch to return by ſincere repentance.

In this ſenſe the words of my text were addreſſed to *Judah* and *Jeruſalem*; and they may alſo come with equal ſtrength and force to the man that was a ſober good youth, but is now moſt ſadly degenerated. And the expoſtulations of the Prophet are enough to ſtrike, to diſſolve ſuch a heart. They adminiſter juſt reproach to ſuch. "*I remember thee, the kindneſs of thy Youth.* At firſt "thou wenteſt after me with eager haſte, and no "difficulties were a check to thy youthful zeal in "the ways of piety. Thou wert then indeed *ho-* "*lineſs to the Lord*, and thy firſt fruits were pecu- "liarly an acceptable ſacrifice; but in thy riper "years thou haſt forſaken me, me the choice and "*guide of thy youth, and haſt forgoten the covenant* "*of thy God! Ah, what iniquity haſt* thou *found* "*in me*, that thou art gone from me, and haſt "loved vanity, and art become altogether vain! "*Neither haſt* thou *ſaid, Where is the Lord that* "*brought me up*, that *led me through the wilder-* "*neſs* hitherto? *And I brought you into a plentiful* "*country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodneſs* "*thereof. Wherefore I will yet plead with you,* "*ſaith the Lord. O generation of men, ſee ye* "*the word of the Lord*; though I led you into *a* "*wilderneſs*, yet ſay, *have I been a wilderneſs to* "*Iſrael, a land of darkneſs? Wherefore then ſay*

"*my*

" *my people, we are lords, we will come no more*
" *unto thee?*"

This manner of expreſſion in my text alſo ſtrongly intimates the abſurdity and ingratitude of ſuch a departure. How abſurd this behaviour! " *Have a nation changed their Gods for thoſe that* " *are no Gods? To forſake the fountain of living* " *waters!* Thoughtleſs ungrateful wretch! What " haſt thou found inſtead thereof but *broken ciſ-* " *terns which can hold no water?* And, O, what " canſt thou expect, but that theſe ſhallow " ſtreams ſhall deceive thee! What, but that " theſe broken ciſterns ſhould be ſoon run out, " and nothing left for thy encreaſing thirſt but the " filthy dregs, which will turn to the bitterneſs " of wormwood and gall in thy bowels!" But having urged this thought in another Sermon, I ſhall proceed no further with it here.

Yet perhaps it may ſtill be ſaid by ſome, " What is this to us? We are not groſs profli- " gates; neither have we caſt off the profeſſion of " religion, nor abandoned ourſelves to vice; we " ſtill retain a regard to the publick profeſſion " of virtue, and wiſh it well." I am very glad to hear this; and it is, upon the whole, much better than nothing. But give me leave to aſk ſome of you, that are now got pretty well on in life, are there none of you to whom my text may come as a reproach for your growing neglects? If your family worſhip, year after year, ſhould be leſs frequent; if your cloſets ſhould become quite ſolitary apartments indeed; if your ſacramental ſeaſons find you quite out of the way, or ſeldom approaching, whereas formerly you were remarkably warm, and ſteady, and conſtant; and if your Sabbaths are but half a day long; may you not hear theſe words, *I remember the kindneſs of*

thy

thy youth, as what ought to overwhelm you with grief and ſorrow? O for ſhame, ye lukewarm, ye backſliding profeſſors of chriſtianity, at laſt bethink yourſelves; and as God *remembers the kindneſs of your youth*, do you remember it too! Think it over with crying and tears, and ſo *remember from whence you are fallen, and repent, and do your firſt works, leſt your latter end be worſe than your begining.*

SERMON

SERMON VII.

A Prayer for Youth at their Entrance on the World.

1 CHRON. IV. 10.

And JABEZ *called upon the God of Iſrael, ſaying, Oh, that thou wouldeſt bleſs me indeed, and enlarge my coaſt; and that thine hand might be with me, that thou wouldeſt keep me from evil that it may not grieve me. And God granted him that which he requeſted.*

WHO this excellent perſon JABEZ was, and from what particular family deſcended, is not certain; tho' it is conjectured he might be one of that laſt mentioned in the foregoing verſe. However, though there is no expreſs mention of his pedigree, yet, in the midſt of a long geneal ogy, where only the names of moſt others are mentioned, he is ſet down by the ſacred writer in a more particular manner, to grace the hiſtory with a character more truly venerable than a deſcent from the grandeſt worldly anceſtors could render him. And though we read nothing of his poſterity, we yet read, in my text, of a name that he left behind him, which was unſpeakably more valuable than that of ſons and of daughters.

ters. The very firſt mention of him is with diſtinguiſhing regard. His character breaks out at once thus, *And* JABEZ *was more honourable than his bretheren.* Some have ſuppoſed this teſtimony to refer to his learning and ſkill in the jewiſh-law, of which they reckon him to have been a doctor, and that he was famous for having many pupils and diſciples. And they imagine that the place or city called *Jabez*, in the * 2*d* chapter of this Book (where there were ſeveral families of the *Scribes*) took its name from this excellent man. But, however this be, it ſeems moſt probable that JABEZ is mentioned as more honourable than the reſt of his bretheren, not ſo much on account of his courage, as with an eminent reſpect to his piety; eſpecially as his excellent Prayer, which is recorded juſt after, diſcovers a mind under the ſtrongeſt impreſſions of ſerious practical religion.

And by ſuch an excellent ſpirit and temper he made abundant amends to his good Mother for that extraordinary trouble and ſorrow with which ſhe bore him. So that, as often as ſhe beheld this her Son, and called him by his name, JABEZ, (i. e. ſorrowful) which ſhe had given him as a memorial of her painful ſeaſon, ſhe muſt almoſt forget her ſorrow, for joy that ſuch a Son was born to her.

This portion of ſcripture has ſomething in it ſo very affecting, and, on many accounts, ſo well fited for the purpoſe, that I thought it might furniſh out a proper diſcourſe to young perſons, for whoſe benefit the religious ſervices of a new year's day, in this place of worſhip, are peculiarly deſigned. Accordingly I propoſe

I. Diſ-

* Ver. 55.

I. Diſtinctly to conſider this Prayer of JABEZ, and the ſeveral parts of it, as they may be ſuppoſed particularly to relate to himſelf.

II. I ſhall point out the ſucceſs of it, the *Lord granted him that which he requeſted.*

III. I ſhall make ſome Reflexions on the whole.

I. would diſtinctly conſider this Prayer of JABEZ, and the ſeveral parts of it, as they may be ſuppoſed to relate to himſelf.

The Prayer, as we have heard, is this, viz. JABEZ *called on the* GOD *of* ISRAEL, *ſaying*, "*Oh, "that thou wouldeſt bleſs me indeed, and enlarge "my coaſt, and that thine hand might be with me, "and that thou wouldeſt keep me from evil, that it "may not grieve me!*" There ſeems ſomething ſo moving and importunate in this requeſt, that I dare ſay the good man felt what he ſpake, and breathed out his whole heart in the petitions.

And there ſeems alſo to be one circumſtance which recommends this act of devotion peculiarly to the young in every age, and that is the time and ſeaſon when we may ſuppoſe JABEZ offered it. Some underſtand it to be at his undertaking ſome very great and dangerous enterprize, ſuch, perhaps, as the driving out the Cannanites from one part of the land which God had promiſed to *Abraham* and the Patriarchs. But, tho' this might be one important affair he had in view, others underſtand it to be at his firſt ſetling in life in general. When, from a view of the uncertainty and dangers of the preſent ſtate, the many evils to which a good man was expoſed, and his own inexperience and inability to order and direct for himſelf

himſelf in the beſt manner, he looked up to God, and aſked his direction, help, and bleſſing. And in this view ſome underſtand it as a vow which this good man made to God, at his firſt entrance on the world; (according to the reading in the margin of our larger Bibles) *O, if thou wouldeſt bleſs me indeed!* Like the religious vow which *Jacob* made when he left his Father's houſe, and ſet out on the journey of life. * *If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on; ſo that I come again to my Father's houſe in peace, then ſhall the Lord be my God.* Let us now go over this Prayer in my text diſtinctly. At this remarkable period of life, this very important one as to his future comfort and happineſs, JABEZ thus pours out his ſoul unto the Lord. And here we may

Take notice of the object of his worſhip, JABEZ *called upon the* GOD *of* ISRAEL.

To this God to whom he had been devoted by his Parents, into whoſe covenant he had been entered in his infancy, by the ſolemn rite of Circumciſion, and in whoſe laws he had been inſtructed from his childhood, to this God he now addreſſes himſelf. It was to the GOD of ISRAEL, the true JEHOVAH, and not to the idols of the Cannanites; him who alone could hear and anſwer the Prayer of the ſincere, humble, contrite ſoul.

And then, it was the Prayer of a devout Iſraelite to the GOD of ISRAEL; and whoſe name, under that character, was both great and amiable, as the God of JACOB that faithful wreſtling Iſrael, who prevailed in Prayer by his own holy importunity. The GOD of ISRAEL, and as ſuch, the friend, the guide, the ſupport, the comfor-

ter,

* Gen. xxviii. 20, 21.

ter, the king and conqueror for the people called by that name; and who was known as ſuch by his terrors and awful judgments among the heathen around them. And JABEZ had this further encouragement to pray to the GOD of ISRAEL, that, as he had allowed, and invited his creatures to pray to him, ſo he *had never ſaid to the ſeed of Jacob, ſeek ye my face in vain.* On this God then he called; and his firſt petition was this,

O, that thou wouldeſt bleſs me indeed! i. e. Bleſs me with real and ſubſtantial bleſſings.

This plainly intimates to us his lively ſenſe of the need he had of the divine bleſſing, and his abſolute dependance on it for any degree of comfort and happineſs in life; that without it he reckoned he could have no well-grounded hope of ſucceſs in any of his undertakings, nor of a tolerable paſſage through a troubleſome world, much leſs any good proſpect at the end of it. While too many others, therefore, were looking, and ſeeking only after earthly good as the moſt deſireable, and truſting only to themſelves for the attaining it, JABEZ looks upwards firſt, and directs his Prayer to the GOD of ISRAEL, ſaying, "*O that thou* "*wouldeſt bleſs me!* Thou, who art the ſource "and fountain of being, of all true bleſſedneſs. "Thy goodneſs has prevented me from the firſt "ſtage of my being unto this day; and I feel "my conſtant neceſſary dependance upon thee! "Seperate from thee my God, there is no wiſdom, "nor device, nor counſil of mine, that I can "confide in. *All that is in heaven and in earth* is "*thine.* Do thou therefore, O Lord, bleſs me, "who alone canſt command the bleſſing, and I "ſhall be bleſſed indeed!"

It is not altogether improbable, but JABEZ might, in this requeſt, refer to the promiſe made long ago to *Abraham*, the Father of the faithful,

when God ſaid to him, * *Surely in bleſſing I will bleſs thee*, &c. q. d. "Let the bleſſing of Abra-"ham come upon me alſo, even me." I can hardly think that ſo good a man as this ſeems to have been would, in ſuch a ſolemn act of devotion, confine all his deſires only to temporal good things; but muſt ſuppoſe that he would carry his views much higher than a vain dying world, and have his mind principally intent on ſpiritual and eternal bleſſings. For with ſuch alone, as a reaſonable immortal Being, could he be bleſſed indeed, or made compleatly happy. And then it ſeems further intimated,

That he thought if he could but ſecure this bleſſing he ſhould be moſt truly bleſſed. That, as nothing without this could make him ſo, with it nothing could make him truly miſerable. With this ſpecial bleſſing of God upon him he knew he was moſt likely to ſucceed in his wiſhes and endeavours as to this world, if it was really beſt for him; or, however, that he ſhould be prepared for the worſt that could befall him here, be inabled to poſſeſs his ſoul in patience under every diſappointment, and have all things made to work together for his good; and that the better things in reverſion beyond the grave would make infinite amends for all the troubles of the preſent ſtate. The next petition is this,

That thou wouldeſt enlarge my coaſt.

We may underſtand this petition as peculiarly ſuited to what are ſuppoſed to have been his circumſtances at this time. If he was going to drive his enemies from that part of the land of *Canaan* which fell to his lot, though he was reckoned to be a man of great natural courage, we ſee he depended not on that alone, but earneſtly implored the divine protection and aſſiſtance in his undertaking.

* Gen. xxii. 17, 18.

taking. That God would ſo favour him as that he might have room for a commodious ſettlement, and ſo be better ſituated for the diſcharge of his duty in the ſeveral ſtations and relations wherein the Providence of God had or might place him. And therefore he adds, *And that thine hand might be with me.* Or we may thus underſtand both theſe petitions, as having a reference to his future life in general. q. d. "I am but as "a pilgrim and a ſtranger upon earth, as all my "Fathers were, let thine hand, O Lord, there-"fore, lead me in the way which I ſhould go; "direct me in my way, and teach me how and "where to pitch my tabernacle; order the bounds "of my habitation ſo as ſhall be moſt comforta-"ble for me. I am a frail weak creature, expo-"ſed to many enemies, O that thine hand might "be with me, to uphold and ſtrengthen me, "to be my protection and defence; and then I "ſhall have no reaſon to be afraid." The expreſſion, in the original, will bear rendering thus, *O that thine hand may work with me!* And ſo we may underſtand it in this ſenſe. "Lord, I would "uſe my beſt endeavours that I may ſucceed in "my honeſt and upright undertakings, but I am "ſenſible I need a more able and ſkilful hand than "mine to proſper me. O that thine hand therefore "might work with mine, and then the work of my "hands ſhall be eſtabliſhed." The laſt petition of JABEZ is this,

And that thou wouldeſt keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me.

In this part of his requeſt it is generally agreed, that he refers to his name given him by his Mother, which (as we have obſerved) ſignifies ſorrow. And there are theſe three things in this part of the Prayer which are worth our taking notice of.

1. His lively affecting ſenſe of the many evils he was expoſed to in ſuch a world as this, and the danger he apprehended from them.

He had, no doubt, in the courſe of his life hitherto, been a witneſs to the afflictions and ſufferings of others. And, as he was probably betimes a grave and thoughtful perſon, he could not but attend to the various evils to which mankind in general were expoſed, and obſerve that thorns and briars grew very thick in the wilderneſs, and *that man was born to trouble as the ſparks flie upward.* And, as often as he thought of his own name and the reaſon of it, he might fear perhaps that he might have a larger ſhare of ſorrow and trouble than other men. "This ſorrow which "JABEZ carried in his name (ſays one) might "ſerve as a conſtant memorial of what a world "he was born into, put an early ſeriouſneſs upon "his ſpirit, and ſo give this proper direction of "his mind and heart to God."

2. In this part of the good man's Prayer you have the matter of his earneſt requeſt to God, under ſuch a lively apprehenſion of evil.

It is this, *That God would keep him from evil.* "That, if it was the will of this all-wiſe and "good God, he might not have thoſe evils over-"take him which he feared; but that he might "be excuſed a ſtate of ſuffering, and paſs through "life with as little inconvenience as poſſible; "eſpecially, that he might not have a larger "ſhare of the troubles and calamities of life than "others."

3. The chief force of this petition lies here, that though he ſhould not go through life free from

from evil and ſorrow; nay, though he might meet with ſome heavy troubles, as he was expoſed to the greateſt, yet that he might not be too much affected and diſheartened by the former, nor quite overwhelmed by the latter. *Keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me.*

" If, in thine all-wiſe Providence, O God, " thou mayeſt ſee fit; if it would be as well for " my ſoul, and as conſiſtent with my ſtate of " trial and probation for another world, I would " then pray, that thou wouldeſt keep me from " all evil. But whether that will be beſt for me " I cannot tell; I leave it therefore to thee, who " art the infinitely wiſe and good diſpoſer of all " events. I would not be ſo ſolicitous about " this, as about the effect which evil and ſorrow " may have upon me if it ſhould come. And " therefore, O God, if it be moſt proper for me, " on the whole, to have ſome ſhare of trouble, " I beſeech thee, who knoweſt the ſtrength and " weakneſs both of my body and my mind, that " thou wouldeſt always adjuſt my trial to my " ſtrength. Let no temptation or affliction ever " overtake me but ſuch as is common to man; " and then may I always have the ſpirit of a " man to ſuſtain my infirmities."

And then, may not this alſo be ſuppoſed in ſuch a Prayer, that he might be kept from bringing evil upon himſelf by his own miſconduct? That no affliction nor trouble might come upon him through his own folly; that he might not be given up to a vain, a ſenſual, a covetous, or falſely ambitious mind; nor run the lengths which ſuch unhappy diſpoſitions would carry him to; that, whatever come upon him, he might not have that moſt dreadful grief which ariſes from the ſting and reproach of his own conſcience. And there-

fore he might pray to be kept from the evil of ſin as well as ſuffering. q. d. "Lord, whatever na-
"tural evils may befall me, I beſeech thee to
"keep me from moral ones. Whatever befalls
"me of ſorrow, let it be in the way of my duty,
"and not in the paths of my raſhneſs and wicked-
"neſs. May I never firſt pervert my way through
"my own folly, and then have my heart fret a-
"gainſt the Lord."

Laſtly. It may ſeem further intimated in this part of the petition, that, if extraordinary and moſt heavy evils ſhould befall him, they might not be ſuffered quite to deſtroy him. "If, after all,
"ſudden and ſurprizing ſhocks ſhould overtake
"me, God grant that they may not overwhelm
"me. May none of the ſevereſt afflictions I can
"poſſibly meet with, in this world, ever drive
"me from my hope and confidence in God, nor
"have ſo dreadful an influence as to cauſe me
"to forſake my God, and make ſhipwreck of a
"good conſcience; but may I be ſuperior to all,
"and eternally triumph." Thus have I conſi-dered this excellent Prayer of JABEZ, and endea-voured to repreſent the force of each petition in it, as it may be ſuppoſed a Prayer at the entrance on life. And I hope I have not gone too far from the text in my enlargement on it. I go on,

II. To take notice of the ſucceſs of this Prayer.

Was it anſwered? Or was the poor, humble, anxious petitioner diſregarded, and rejected? It is ſaid, *the Lord granted him that which he requeſted.*

And if we conſider this as declared in the gene-ral, without any exception to any one petition of his Prayer, in the view I have repreſented it, may we not preſume each was granted? That the all-wiſe and good God ſaw fit to enlarge the coaſt of

JABEZ,

JABEZ, to widen and extend his borders, and to grant him an agreable peaceful ſettlement; continued health, long life, and a freedom from evil; proſperous circumſtances, and an uninterrupted eaſy mind from the moſt calm peaceful reflexions of conſcience; the *candle of the Lord ſhining upon his tabernacle, the hand of the Lord working with him* to ſucceed and forward all his undertakings; and the ſpecial bleſſing of God to ſweeten all the reſt, and to crown all, at laſt, with eternal happineſs in a better world? Thus thrice happy, may we ſuppoſe, was this excellent man; thus bleſſed was he, a faithful *Iſraelite*, of the GOD of ISRAEL, who was bleſſed indeed. I now proceed,

III. To make ſome Reflexions on this ſubject which may be ſuitable to us all, and eſpecially to the young.

1. From the time of life when we have ſuppoſed JABEZ to make this Prayer, thoſe young perſons who may have grown up ſo far as to be ſetling in the world, may receive ſome very uſeful and ſeaſonable inſtructions.

For inſtance,

1. They may learn, that a ſober and ſeriouſly thoughtful temper, at ſuch a time, is moſt ſuitable and becoming.

They may ſee that it is below the dignity of human nature to ruſh into life in a vain wanton manner, without any decent reflexion, like the *horſe or the mule which have no underſtanding*, only juſt as ſenſe, paſſion, and brutal inſtinct direct; ſince it is a very important ſtep indeed which they are taking, even ſuch on which depends not only their

their future comfortable paſſage through life, but their ſafe and happy remove out of it. And therefore a man had need to have his eyes about him, and to look forward, as well as on the right hand and on the left, and be very fearful of going wrong, and wandering in a falſe way.

2. You, my young friends, may be further inſtructed, from this ſubject, what are the proper ſober thoughts for you at this ſeaſon.

Such as the vanity of the world, the vexations and troubles you are expoſed to in it, the weak and frail nature of man who is to dwell in it, who is liable to be overſet by the leaſt evil, and may yet be called to ſtruggle with the greateſt.

3. It will alſo be very wiſe for ſuch of you to conſider, what ſchemes are proper for you to lay, what ends to propoſe to yourſelves; that you may order your affairs as becomes thoſe who are, at the longeſt, to dwell here but a ſhort time, and ſoon to remove to an everlaſting ſettlement,

You ſhould provide how you may paſs through life well, and out of it comfortably. Expect and prepare for evils, if they ſhould come; and endeavour to meet them in ſuch a poſture and frame of mind, as that they may not be to your entire deſtruction. In a word, think how you may beſt enjoy the comforts of life with a double reliſh, and have the unavoidable afflictions of it ſo lightened, as not to be ſwallowed up of over much ſorrow.

4. My text inſtructs you further, my young friends, what is neceſſary to the attaining theſe valuable ends, and this comfortable proviſion for ſupport and guidance through life, which your

your thoughts may be working upon at this critical ſeaſon, and that is, the ſecuring the ſpecial bleſſing of God upon you, and all your undertakings.

This is of the greateſt importance, of the utmoſt conſequence, for without it it is impoſſible you ſhould be bleſſed; without it, whatſoever you may ſeem to enjoy, will prove a curſe rather than a bleſſing, and you will find nothing but bitterneſs in the latter end. Here then begin, lay this at the foundation of your ſeting out in the world, above all other getings, to get this bleſſing of God indeed. And

5. When you are thus fully convinced of your abſolute need of this ſpecial bleſſing of God upon you, for all your future comfort and happineſs, my text alſo ſhews you the way to obtain it, and that is, by ſolemn fervent Prayer to God.

Come then, Sirs, and in the early part of your life (thoſe of you eſpecially, who may this new year have a view of ſetling in the world) be perſuaded to attend to this inſtruction, and to follow this advice. You are, perhaps, for taking counſil of others, at ſuch a ſeaſon, who are experienced in the affairs and buſineſs of this life, and have gone through great part of it before you. And one of them, probably, can inform you where you may be likely to have the moſt commodious ſituation; another may bring you into the moſt advantageous company; and a third may direct and aſſiſt you in managing your affairs in the moſt prudent and profitable manner; while another may be pointing out the errors and miſtakes of many that have gone before you for your caution and warning.

ing. Among the reſt, Sirs, give me leave to ſtep in this day, and propoſe to you one ſure way by which you may ſecure every thing that is really good for you; and keep off, or elſe ſupport you under, every thing that is really evil, and that is, by ſerious fervent devotion, imploring the ſpecial favour and bleſſing of God upon you, and all your undertakings.

Do not then engage in any thing wherein you cannot reaſonably hope for his bleſſing; and in all your lawful undertakings endeavour to draw it down upon you; and that you may do ſo, I have brought you a Prayer of a good man as a moſt excellent pattern.

Go then, and before thou ſtepeſt boldly into life in thine own ſtrength, preſuming that thy coaſt ſhall be widened, and thy life ſhall paſs on free from evil, and quite eaſy at thy pleaſure; go, firſt enter into thy cloſet on this new year's day, and ſhut thy door; and, after a ſerious thoughtful review of thy paſt life, a reflexion on thy weakneſſes and thy wants, and taking a proſpect into future time, feel thy dependance on God, and fall down before him, ſaying in humble Prayer, *O that thou, Lord, wouldeſt bleſs me indeed, and that thine hand may be with me; and that thou wouldeſt keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!* And, to imitate this example in my text, you have the greateſt encouragement from the ſucceſs of his Prayer. The *Lord*, we have heard, *granted him his requeſt.* And may the ſame God, that ſees in ſecret, witneſs to the ſincerity of your hearts, and grant you according to the deſires of your ſouls.

11. We may infer that a life of early ſeriouſneſs and devotedneſs to God is moſt truly honourable.

JABEZ

JABEZ *was more honourable than his bretheren*; and what rendered him ſo? Why his early piety, and his beautifully diſcovering that right temper in this ſolemn act of devotion; and no doubt, his acting agreably thereto in his after conduct. It was this that gave him a name above all the reſt of his family, and handed down his name through ſucceſſive generations, that all might ſee who was the young perſon that God delighted to bleſs. And for the ſame reaſon that early piety is ever reckoned honourable, it muſt be always ſo; even becauſe it is acting up to the true dignity of human nature, and moſt worthy of our powers and faculties, which the ſooner we begin to do ſo much the better. Be not then aſhamed, my young friends, of religion and ſtrict piety at your years, as if it argued cowardice and meanneſs of ſpirit; neither *caſt off fear, nor reſtrain Prayer before God*, as if it ſhewed an unmanlineſs for you, in the full vigour of your ſtrength and ſprightly powers, and a want of courage, to own your dependance on an inviſible God, and confeſs your need of his aſſiſtance; but rather eſteem it the moſt conſiſtent behaviour, the moſt proper and fit, to *acknowledge him in all your ways*. And, inſtead of being perverted by the example or ridicule of the wicked, remember that GOD *himſelf hath ſaid unto man*, * *Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wiſdom*; and *to depart from evil, that is underſtanding*; and, *that they that honour me, I will honour*; *but they that deſpiſe me ſhall be lightly eſteemed.*

III. We may all learn, from this ſubject, that it is a very lawful thing even for good perſons to pray (with ſubmiſſion to the will of God) againſt the evils and afflictions of life, eſpecially

* Job xxviii. 28. 1 Sam. ii. 30.

cially thoſe which may be peculiarly heavy and grievous.

Pain and ſorrow, loſſes and ſhocking troubles, are real evils, whatever the Stoic may ſay to the contrary. And, as ſuch, they cannot but be diſagreable to fleſh and blood, and innocently diſguſtful to human nature. Wherefore that part of the Prayer in my text, is the natural language of ſuch creatures as we are. "That, if it be the will "of God, we may eſcape great ſufferings, and "over much ſorrow and pain; that we may have "a moderate ſhare at leaſt of eaſe and comfort "in our paſſage ſtate, and only tolerable evils."

Nor is the great God ever diſpleaſed with ſuch petitions, offered with becoming ſubmiſſion and reſignation to his holy will, but only at our pretending to dictate to him in a peremptory manner what we think beſt as to futurity; becauſe this argues a temper not properly broke to the divine hand and government; and therefore ſuch a temper, if affliction could not any other way be avoided, would chuſe ſin rather than ſuffering.

IV. We may each of us learn, from what has been ſaid, that the beſt preparation either for avoiding evils in life, or meeting them in a proper manner, is by a mind thoroughly impreſſed with practical religion, expreſſing itſelf in frequent, fervent, lively devotion.

Such a perſon lives as if God was always viſibly preſent before him; and beholds all the changes and events in time, in quite another light than that in which the gay, the vain, and careleſs world behold them. And, by his frequent converſe with God, he ſecures a peace and ſtability

of

of mind, which the world cannot give nor take away; and ſuch a guard and defence as no evil ſhall be finally able to overſet his heart. However he may be afflicted here, let him have one of the hardeſt lots that the beſt man ever had in a bad world, yet he is in ſome meaſure prepared for it beforehand. So that he has no reaſon to faint in a day of adverſity, or to ſorrow as thoſe without hope; for that which occaſions deep grief to others is done away as to him, (even the evil of ſin) and the bleſſing of God, and his ſkilful hand is ever with him to make all things work for his good now, and to work out a glorious end at laſt. In a word, all his grief and trouble ſhall hold no longer than this life; and death, which is the moſt dreadful of all terrible things to the wicked, is to him unſtung, and cannot really hurt him; it will rather act the part of a kind friend to him, by releaſing him from a valley of tears, and introducing him into a world *where ſorrow and ſighing ſhall flee away*; *and there ſhall be no more crying, nor pain*; *neither ſhall there be any more death, becauſe the former things ſhall be done away*; *and he that ſiteth upon the throne ſayeth, behold, I make all things new.*

Into that new heaven and new earth, wherein dwell nothing but perfect righteouſneſs and everlaſting joy, may we be admited when this world and all that is therein ſhall paſs away, through Jeſus Chriſt. To whom be glory and dominion for ever. AMEN.

SERMON VIII.

The Miniſter's Encouragement and Joy.

II Epiſtle of JOHN, verſe 4.

I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy Children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.

I Shall take it for granted, (becauſe it is moſt probable) that St. JOHN the Evangeliſt and Apoſtle, the beloved diſciple of the beſt and moſt lovely Maſter, was the author of this Epiſtle, as well as the former; and that it was inſcribed to a particular perſon, and not to a church, or the mother church at Jeruſalem, as ſome have imagined.

The character under which the Apoſtle repreſents himſelf, as the elder, was peculiarly ſuitable to his ſtanding in the chriſtian church, and his age of life, as well as to the honourable perſon to whom he wrote. And who that was he informs us at the begining of the Epiſtle, in this very grave, ſolemn, and moſt elegant manner.

The elder to the elect Lady, with her Children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but alſo all that have known the truth.

Here

Here was a venerable Matron, not more diſtinguiſhed by her rank and fortune in life, than by her ſpecial regards and obedience to the goſpel, ſo that ſhe was of eminent note among chriſtians for her generoſity and charity, and thought worthy of the high eſteem of an Apoſtle himſelf; eſpecially as by her wiſe and tender inſtructions, and excellent example, ſhe had inclined her Children, as they grew up, to ingage themſelves in the ſame noble cauſe and intereſt. And as the family of *Lazarus* was that to which Jeſus himſelf uſed to reſort with peculiar pleaſure when on earth, and for which he maintained a tender regard when he was abſent from it; it is not improbable but this amiable diſciple might frequent the houſe of this devout Lady, as a family where he was received with that eſteem which his character deſerved, and where he had the ſatisfaction to find the religion of his dear Maſter diſplaying itſelf, in domeſtick life, in all its dignity and beauty. And the ſatisfaction muſt riſe high indeed, in the Apoſtle's mind, if he had himſelf converted his honourable friend to the chriſtian faith.

No wonder then that we find him, when at a diſtance, mindful of the ſpiritual ſtate of this truly valuable houſhold; and ſolicitous to expreſs, in the beſt and moſt proper manner he could, his ſpecial concern for their trueſt welfare and happineſs during his abſence. To this purpoſe he writes this excellent Letter, in which he endeavours, with all the authority of the oldeſt Apoſtle, mixed with the workings of the moſt delicate, ſincere, and refined friendſhip, to eſtabliſh this worthy Parent with her Children in the truth, againſt all the deſigns and practices of falſe teachers and deceivers.

And as he well knew nothing could be more agreable to a fond Mother, than to hear of the

welfare and proſperity of any of her Children that were abſent from her, he informs her, that *he found ſome of them*, who were come to *Epheſus*, (probably on their own affairs) though quite from under her immediate care, and expoſed to temptation, yet behaving worthy of their truly honourable deſcent, and of the holy religion they profeſſed. And he communicates this account in ſuch a manner as ſhews how ſincere a ſharer he was with her in ſuch a joy.

I rejoiced greatly (ſays he) *that I found of thy Children walking in truth, as we have received commandment from the Father.*

And theſe words I have choſen for the ſervices of this day, becauſe I apprehend them admirably ſuited to convey ſome very uſeful and important inſtructions to the young, as well as a word of advice and encouragement to Parents themſelves. To this purpoſe I ſhall enlarge on the following plain, obvious, doctrinal Propoſition, viz.

That it affords great ſatisfaction and joy to the Miniſters of the goſpel, to obſerve the Children of religious Parents walking in the ſame way of faith and piety with them.

Here then it will be proper to conſider diſtinctly

I. The occaſion of the Apoſtle's joy.

II. The ſpecial reaſons for it. And this will make way for a particular Application.

I. Let us conſider the occaſion of the Apoſtle's joy, and that of all ſerious Miniſters after him.

I rejoiced greatly (ſays he) *that I found of thy Children walking in truth, according as we have received a commandment of the Father.* By

By *walking* we are here to underſtand the general courſe of a man's life, which is frequently and very ſignificantly expreſſed by this metaphor in ſcripture. And by the *truth*, ſome underſtand truly and ſincerely, i. e. the living according to the rules of truth and righteouſneſs in general. But, as the Apoſtle had before ſpoken of the truth, by way of emphaſis, * *for the truth's ſake which dwelleth in us*, I apprehend he refers, in a ſpecial manner, to the doctrine of the goſpel, that grand and moſt noble ſcheme of religion, brought down from heaven by the Son of God, and publiſhed for the information, the direction, the guidance, and the happineſs of a dark and guilty world.

This, which the Apoſtle calls the † *doctrine of Chriſt*, he particularly ſtiles *the truth*. Inaſmuch as it is moſt certainly a true religion, a faithful revelation from God the fountain of unchangeable eternal truth and goodneſs; as it was delivered by Jeſus Chriſt the Son of God, who was himſelf perfect truth, and declared that what he publiſhed to mankind was in virtue of that ſpecial commandment which he received from the Father. And the veracity of his teſtimony, as the faithful witneſs, was confirmed by his reſurrection from the dead; and by God alſo himſelf afterwards bearing witneſs to the truth of the doctrine (when preached by the Apoſtles) by *ſigns*, and *wonders*, and *divers miracles*, *and gifts of the holy Ghoſt*.

And then the goſpel may alſo be ſtiled *the truth*, as it is the only certain rule of faith and manners, to which mankind are to adhere; not only in oppoſition to the religion of the heathen, which is in its own nature falſe, but alſo in diſtinction from the jewiſh, which was once the only true revelation from God. Even that was to be no longer

* Ver. 2. † Ver. 9.

in force, but the doctrine of Chriſt, the *truth as it is in Jeſus*, and that alone, * *is to dwell in us, and be with us*, as our light and our guide, *for ever*.

Now the *walking in this truth* implies

1. The continuing in a ſteady adherence to the pure faith of the goſpel, as delivered by Chriſt from God.

2. The directing the heart and life according to the ſtrict rules and precepts of it, as a doctrine according to godlineſs.

1. *Walking in the truth* implies, the continuing in a ſteady adherence to the pure chriſtian faith as delivered by Chriſt, according to the *commandment of God the Father*.

This, no doubt, our Apoſtle obſerved and witneſſed to in the Children of this excellent Saint; that he found them conſcientiouſly regarding and keeping, as a ſacred treaſure, that true doctrine of the goſpel, that *form of ſound words*, in which they had been inſtructed from early life by their venerable Parent, and, perhaps, at times, under the inſpection of the Apoſtle himſelf.

What this true faith of the goſpel was, theſe young diſciples might eaſily know from this Apoſtle himſelf, who had not only read and approved the three firſt goſpel hiſtories as genuine, but, by this time, probably, had writen his own goſpel; and they might have the great advantage alſo of his own explanation of it, as often as any difficulty might occur in the reading of it.

And we find the fundamental articles of the chriſtian faith, as delivered in the goſpel, and con-

* Ver. 2.

firmed by this Apoſtle, to be very few and plain. Such as, "the belief that *Jeſus Chriſt* "*was come in the fleſh*; and that he came in the "fleſh that *we might live through him*, through "him as dying for us. That this is the moſt "aſtoniſhing inſtance of the love of God, and of "this his Son Jeſus Chriſt, that he died for our "ſins. And that, though the deſign of the goſpel "is to prevent ſin, yet however, if, through "the infirmities of the fleſh, *any man ſhould ſin*, "he need not, on his repentance, abſolutely "deſpair, becauſe we have (if penitent ſiners) "*an advocate with the Father, even Jeſus Chriſt the* "*righteous*; *who is alſo the propitiation for our ſins*; "*and not for ours only, but for the ſins of the whole* "*world*. That whoſoever profeſſes to be a "chriſtian, and ſo born of God, and by his Spirit, "muſt diſcover himſelf to be a true child of God "by abſtaining from all ſin, and preſerving him-"ſelf as an *holy ſeed*; *keeping himſelf that the* "*wicked one, the devil, touch him not*, ſo as to "bring him under the power of moral corrup-"tion. That he ſhow himſelf a child of God, "by loving his heavenly Father; by diſcovering "that love in keeping his commandments; and eſ-"pecially that new commandment of the dying "Saviour to love all mankind, and particularly all "fellow chriſtians; or (in the Apoſtle's own "words) to ſhow our love to *that God whom* "*we have not ſeen*, by our love to our *brother* "*whom we have ſeen*." The true chriſtian faith, according to St. JOHN, is ſuch an one as teaches us "*to overcome the world*, its flatteries, allure-"ments, and terrors, in proſpect of the *full ma-*"*niſeſtation of the ſons of God at the great day*; "when they ſhall moſt gloriouſly know all that "their adoption means, by *ſeeing God, as he is*, "*and being transformed into his perfect likeneſs*."

This

This was the faith in which St. JOHN found theſe young perſons of whom he wrote. And, though we live a long while after the age of the oldeſt Apoſtle, and have not the advantage of converſing with him, or his immediate ſucceſſors in the miniſtry, yet we have the ſame doctrine which he delivered as the rule of faith to theſe his own diſciples, without any alteration; delivered, not by oral tradition, through many generations, but by writing, authentick writing, from this Apoſtle himſelf.

And therefore *walking in the truth* is the ſame thing to us and our Children, as it was from the begining. It is one and the ſame goſpel which we receive with them who had it immediately from the Apoſtles. It is one and the ſame faith which was once, (at once) *delivered to the ſaints*, by the *Lord himſelf*. The Apoſtles, even this beloved diſciple himſelf, never offered to make one new article of faith; nor is there any doctrine enjoined in any of their Epiſtles, as neceſſary to be believed by any chriſtian, but what is to be found in the four goſpels, which contain the hiſtory of the preaching and doctrine of Jeſus himſelf, the only Lord and head of the chriſtian church. So that we do not walk uncertainly, when we take the holy ſcripture for our only rule of faith; and, inſtead of interpreting them by the favourite ſchemes of fallible men, endeavour to judge of them in the beſt manner we can; and make uſe of the learning and opinion of others, not as directories for us, but only as helps to underſtand them; the true and real worth of which ſentiments, is to be tried by their agrement with the law and with the teſtimony.

2. *Walking in the truth* implies above all things the conſtant gro*v*ing direction of the heart and life,

life, according to the rules and precepts of the goſpel.

Without this the ſcripture repreſents the profeſſed faith in Chriſt, to be an imperfect vain thing. Becauſe faith, according to the goſpel ſenſe of it, is always repreſented as a moral virtue, as lying much more in the heart than in the head; and it is of unſpeakably leſs importance what any man's notions may be, about ſpeculative points, than what his temper and conduct is. If he is really a ſerious good man, he cannot err fundamentally; and without this right and good and honeſt heart, without *faith in God and Chriſt, working by love to God and man, and purifying the heart*, all the talk and noiſy pretenſions to ſoundneſs, and even to a full aſſurance of faith, are no better than *ſounding braſs*, and a *tinkling cymbal*. *Little Children* (ſays our Apoſtle) *be not deceived, he that doeth righteouſneſs is righteous, even as he alſo is righteous.* * *He that commiteth ſin*, (i. e. wilfully) *is of the devil; for the devil ſineth from the begining. For this purpoſe was the Son of God manifeſted, that he might deſtroy the works of the devil.* † *In this the Children of God are manifeſted, and the Children of the devil. He that doeth not righteouſneſs is not of God; neither he that loveth not his brother.* ‡ *My little Children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue* (only) *but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and ſhall aſſure our hearts before him. For this is his commandment, that we ſhould believe on the name of his Son Jeſus Chriſt, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.*

According to this perfectly true rule of life, then, did theſe young perſons walk, of whom our Apoſtle ſpeaks. They had been nouriſhed up from their

* Ep. iii. 7, 8. † Ver. 18. ‡ Ver. 18, 19.

their earlieſt age, in faith and ſound doctrine, by their wiſe and good Parent; and, as they grew in years, they grew alſo in grace, *and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt.* The *commandment received* by *Chriſt from the Father*, and preached to them by his inſpired Apoſtles, they had ever before their eyes; by this they examined all other pretenſions to truth; by this they learned to avoid the prevailing errors of the times in which they lived, and to fortify themſelves againſt the *cuning craftineſs of thoſe who lay in wait to deceive them, and cauſe them to make ſhipwreck of faith*, and a *good conſcience.* And by this commandment they governed their hearts, diſciplined their youthful paſſions, learned to be *ſober-minded, chaſte, temperate, diſcreet, ordering their converſation aright*, and to avoid the company of the wicked and profane; by this they governed themſelves in all their affairs and buſineſs of life; in all their tranſactions in the world, wherever they went, their whole courſe was becoming the goſpel; and thus, as they increaſed in ſtature, they increaſed in the moſt excellent and ſubſtantial wiſdom, and in favour with God and man.

Now ſuch a behaviour in theſe young perſons, and ſuch a teſtimony to the goodneſs of their character by an inſpired Apoſtle, was much to their honour. It was ſomething peculiarly amiable and excellent, that, in a time of great degeneracy, they had preſerved their integrity; that, when others were ſeduced by the deceivers, and antichriſt, they were thoroughly rooted and grounded in the faith, and did abide in the doctrine of Chriſt; that when many of their age turned aſide after lying vanities, and the follies of youth, they walked in the ways of true holineſs and virtue, and became remarkable for their regards to it wherever they went.

And

And this was occaſion of great joy to the Apoſtle, as it is alſo to all inferior Miniſters, in every ſucceeding age of the church, when they behold the Children of religious Parents *walking in the ſame truth.*

But why does this afford ſo much joy to the Miniſters of Chriſt? This leads me now

II. To inquire into the ſpecial reaſons for this joy.

And I apprehend, among others, the following reaſons may be juſtly admited.

1. For the ſake of the truth itſelf, and him whoſe cauſe it is.

Every ſincere Miniſter is a friend an advocate for truth, and entirely devoted to its ſervice. He loves it as the moſt amiable and excellent good; it is the buſineſs of his ſtudies to enquire and ſearch diligently till he find it, *to ſeek for it as for ſilver, and ſearch for it as for hid treaſures.* And when he has found it, he holds it faſt; and, rather than let it go for any worldly conſideration whatſoever, he will die with it in his arms. It is the buſineſs, the pleaſure of his life, to recommend it to the world, as moſt worthy the purſuit and chief regard of rational beings. And therefore, whenever he ſees it prevail, he feels a manly ſatisfaction and joy, which ſtrangers intermeddle not with.

And this joy encreaſes in proportion to the importance of the truth. When therefore that which is of the greateſt importance to mankind, that, in which their everlaſting happineſs is concerned, when they ſee that make its way into the hearts of men, and captivate young minds to its early obedience, this is a moſt agreable circumſtance indeed,

deed. And this truth is contained in the goſpel, that moſt perfect rule of faith and practice, that divine ſcheme of religion which the Son of God thought it worth while to come down from heaven to this earth of ours to publiſh. This is eminently his cauſe; and in proportion as this religion is heartily embraced, will his intereſt ſucceed in a degenerate world. And when we think how he loved us, ſurely we muſt above all wiſh well to his cauſe, and the ſucceſs of it muſt afford true and ſubſtantial joy.

No doubt this reflection raiſed the joy of this beloved diſciple of his Maſter; and it will, in ſome good degree, affect all other Miniſters *who love the Lord Jeſus Chriſt in ſincerity.*

2. Another ſpecial reaſon why the Miniſters of the goſpel find ſo great joy when they obſerve any of the Children of religious Parents *walking in the truth* is, becauſe ſo many turn aſide from the *commandment delivered to them*, and walk in a contrary path.

Would to God that the early degeneracy which is the great complaint of the preſent age, as it has been of former, aroſe only from among the Children of wicked Parents, ſuch as had never known, nor acknowledged the good ways of God at all. But, alas, to our great our almoſt daily concern and grief, we find that even too many of ſuch as have deſcended from thoſe who truly feared God, and have been eminent for piety, who have been born Children of the Covenant, early inſtructed in the *truth as it is in Jeſus*, and been taught the way of truth more perfectly than others, by the counſil and example of their Parents, and have been brought betimes under the miniſtrations of the goſpel; I ſay it is too common

to

to find many ſuch as theſe to *forſake the Lord God of their Fathers*, and the *guide of their youth*; to break through the ſtrong bonds of their excellent education, *forgot the covenant of their God*, and to be ſoon led away by the deceitfulneſs of ſin, and the error of the wicked, to the indulgence of youthful luſts; to bad and vicious practices firſt, and then, very often, to corrupt and wicked principles, to make themſelves eaſy in their practice.

This is a melancholy truth, ſadly atteſted by the weeping eyes, and the breaking hearts of many excellent ſaints, who are going down to the grave mourning for their unhappy Children, loſt to God, to holineſs, and heaven; and walking in the *paths of the deſtroyer*, *led captive by him at his will.* There were, probably, ſome ſuch degenerate plants from ſuch excellent and noble ſtocks in the days of our Apoſtle. This ſome have imagined from the manner of expreſſion, *I have found of* THY *Children walking in truth*; which (ſay they) ſeems to intimate, that he had obſerved ſome young perſons, notwithſtanding all their advantages, taking a contrary courſe.

But now, on the other hand, to obſerve the Children of religious Parents imitating their faith and piety, to find that the principles of their good education take an early hold of them, and that they enquire betimes of God their Maker, and Jeſus their Saviour; to ſee them taking hold of divine inſtruction, ordering their ſteps by the word of God, and walking betimes according to the holy commandment; to watch their eſcaping the corruptions of the world, their avoiding the company of ſiners, and their delighting in the ſociety of the wiſe and good; and find them coming to a ſacramental table, there to engage themſelves in the moſt ſolemn manner to God, and to put

in their humble claim to the bleſſings of the goſpel covenant; thus to ſee the Children of thy ſervants, O Lord, *walking in the truth*, muſt afford the Miniſters of religion a moſt rational and noble joy. Becauſe

3. Hereby they have greater encouragement to go on in their own work with the hope of growing ſucceſs.

Our firſt expectations are from the Children of good Parents. Theſe we are ready to imagine may ſooner be brought to apprehend the things of God, than the Children of ſtrangers. And therefore we are often endeavouring, in the courſe of our miniſtry, to affect them; to teach their youthful hearts to ſet in with parental inſtructions, and, if poſſible, win their tender minds to God and the Redeemer. And, with our endeavours, we join our prayers that our meſſage and perſuaſions may not be rejected by them; that we may at leaſt be received by thoſe whom (on ſome accounts) we reckon our own.

And if we are ſo happy as to gain their attention, and to fix them for God, then we are made glad in the Lord; and hope that our labour has not been quite in vain. And our ſouls are quickened, to go on in the work and labour of love, when we find thoſe anſwering our expectations whom we are firſt led ſtrongly to ſolicit and perſuade.

I only add, under this head, that the beholding the Children of good Parents *walking in the truth*, is a peculiar encouragement to younger Miniſters.

The Parents were before in Chriſt, known and read of all men as his true diſciples, e'er we perhaps had entered on the ſacred ſervice of the goſpel. And if we can any way help them on in their faith and

and advancing holineſs, we eſteem it our honour. But our chief buſineſs is, generally, with their Children; to try if we can, by all the force and power of goſpel arguments and motives, bring them *to ſeek after the Lord God of their Fathers, and to ſerve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind*; and if we are ſucceſsful, we then joy in the firſt fruits of our labours, and are quickened in our zeal and diligence, from this promiſing hope of a comfortable harveſt.

But what is this our joy, on your account, my young friends? Is it ſelfiſh? Yes it is, in one ſenſe. It is that we may have the ſatisfaction, the unſpeakable pleaſure to rejoice over you in the *day of our Lord Jeſus as our crown.* And in this ſelfiſhneſs I dare ſay you will indulge us, becauſe you ſee we ſeek not yours but you, your everlaſting happineſs, and thus diſcover our trueſt, our nobleſt benevolence. I add, yet once more,

4. The other reaſon of this joy at finding the Children of religious Parents walking in the truth, is the proſpect that the true religion ſhall not die with the preſent generation, but that it ſhall live and flouriſh when the Parents and Miniſters in it ſhall be gone to another world.

And this is a reaſon which is natural and moſt becoming to every true ſincere chriſtian. This enquiry, in a way of humble prayer, is the proper breathing of a devout mind. "*Lord, what wilt thou do for thy great name? Jacob is ſmall,* the cauſe and intereſt of religion, and of thy dear Son, is in a declining ſtate; by whom ſhall it ariſe? Who *will ſtand up for thee, O Lord,* when the ſaints now geting nearer and nearer home, ſhall be arrived ſafe at heaven?"

With ſuch an encouragement as that in the text, the anſwer is ready. "Lord, (ſay we), here are "the Children whom thou haſt graciouſly given "thy ſervants! We have known their early "dedication to thee, we have obſerved their "early piety, and we have *found of them walk-* "*ing in the truth as it is in Jeſus!* And we have "the pleaſure to ſee ſome of them coming to thy "table, and there engaging themſelves to be to "thee, for a name and for a praiſe. And here "we principally hope."

It is certain, indeed, that while God thinks fit to have a church on earth, he will take care of it; and rather than want members for it, he can of *ſtones raiſe up Children to Abraham.* But ſtill the way in which God juſtly expects his church ſhould be kept up in the world, and therefore the way in which the Miniſters of it may moſt probably hope for it, is by the Children of chriſtian Parents *walking in the truth.* And as often as they can obſerve this, they have a peculiar joy. Becauſe, as they love the intereſt of their dear Redeemer better than their own, they can leave the world with this reviving thought, that the moſt noble cauſe that ever was ſhall not die in their hands, nor be buried in the grave with themſelves, but that afterwards *a ſeed ſhall ſerve the Lord, which ſhall be accounted to him for a generation.*

With this comfortable proſpect did the elder Miniſters of the church in later ages die, as well as the Apoſtle JOHN. Thoſe who have been ſo happy as to engage the Parents and the Children too for God, are gone to receive their reward with the great ſhepherd and biſhop of ſouls; and they are waiting till, one after another, thoſe they have, through divine grace, *begotten in the goſpel*, follow them ſafe to heaven, and add to the weight

weight and the luſtre of their crown. And we, who are entered into their labours, have our joy to be compleated by their deſcendants. God grant that our joy may be full.

Thus have I finiſhed the ſubject, and would now apply it in the beſt manner I can.

And when I look over this worſhiping aſſembly, and behold religious Parents at the head of their Children here witneſſing for God this day, and encouraging this ſervice by their example, and their own experience of the benefit and advantage of early religion; I congratulate you, my honoured friends, I give you the moſt friendly and chriſtian joy that the return of a new year can poſſibly afford, by your finding your Children *walking in the truth of the goſpel*, and adhering firmly to the doctrine of it as taught in the holy Scriptures; and directing their youthful ſteps according to its rules. I congratulate you, ye advanced diſciples in the ſchool of Chriſt, upon obſerving the good effects of your pious prayers and endeavours, in the early piety of your deſcendants; and that many of them, not only grow up like olive plants (emblems of domeſtick peace and happineſs) around your table, but are betimes with you at the table of the Lord; and are tranſplanted from your family into the houſe of God, and that they flouriſh already in his courts. There may they thrive like *trees planted by the rivers of the water of life*, which ſhall grow and and ſpread, and *bring forth fruit in due ſeaſon*. There may you have long the pleaſure of beholding their abounding goodneſs. And, when you ſhall be removed to the paradiſe above, may they fill your place in this garden of the

Lord below, and *bring forth fruit even to old age.*

And give us Miniſters leave to rejoice with you, and to aſſure you that we have no greater joy than to *find of your Children walking in the truth*; to witneſs to their ſpecial regard to it, in their behaviour in the world, as well as in the church of Chriſt. And, if ſuch an unworthy labourer, as he who now ſpeaks to you may hope he has at any time been inſtrumental in helping your Children on in this moſt excellent way, which you have ſo long trod yourſelves, you will allow him a greater ſhare in your joy, as well as join with him in his own.

And, that your joy may be full, give me leave to exhort you, my venerable friends, to improve more and more in the dignity of the parental character with your advancing years, by a ſtrict regard to true manly religion, and ſterling chriſtianity, as found in the Bible; by taking care that your old age, inſtead of being rendered uſeleſs, or worſe to the riſing generation (by ſinking into a low, vain, gay, and fluttering life) become more exemplary and inviting; by that noble chearful gravity, that wiſe ſobriety of mind, that encreaſing benevolence and generoſity, that grand contempt of the world and the things of it, and that ſpiritual heavenly temper, which ſo much becomes thoſe ſo near eternity; which ſhall render you the delight of your pious offſpring, ſhall beſt ſecure their filial obedience, and make them ambitious not only to live like you, but to have their latter end, and their death like yours alſo.

To you, the Children of the faithful, who are *found walking in the truth*, I would now addreſs myſelf, with the moſt fervent expreſſions

of

of thankfulneſs to God, and affectionate joy on your account. But, while I thus tell you how much I *joy*, and *rejoice with you all*, how much I am obliged to any of you for your regard to my poor ſervices, ſuffer me alſo to be, this day, your friendly Monitor. And let me beſpeak you in the words of our Apoſtle. * *See that you loſe not the things you have wrought, but that you receive a full reward.* Let every returning year find you more thoroughly eſtabliſhed in the faith, and more fervently attached to the *truth as it is in Jeſus*. To this purpoſe keep cloſe to the rule of faith, as it is to be found in the written goſpels; and take heed of being led captive by any favourite ſchemes of men of any party whatſoever. Be ſteady and conſtant in your attendance on the ſervices of God's houſe, and eſpecially at his holy table. Theſe are excellent means to ſtrengthen your faith, and to confirm your piety and virtue. See that your hearts are more and more warmed with love to a Redeemer, and then you will be in leſs danger of forſaking his cauſe, or becoming indifferent to it.

Again, be always found *walking in the truth*, as it is a rule of holy life and converſation. Let practical chriſtianity be the habit, the dreſs, the complexion of your minds; it will be always in faſhion, it will be the grandeſt ornament, it will be the health, and the beauty of your countenance.

Once more. Carry your religion with you wherever you go. That ſo, if you ſhould be called to reſide at a diſtance from your pious Parents or Guardians, the Miniſters of the goſpel there may give this honourable teſtimony concerning you, (as was that of the young perſons

* Ver. 8.

perſons in my text) to thoſe whoſe hearts are with you, that you alſo are found acting quite in character; avoiding the company of the wicked and profane, and walking in the ways of true ſtrict piety and virtue. In a word, be ambitious of excelling thoſe who have gone before you in every grace, and *abounding ſtill in the work of the Lord.*

But, to cloſe all, are there any of the Children of good Parents here who are not known under this amiable character, who are indifferent to religion, and ſtrangers to the proper influence of the goſpel on their hearts? O let me, if poſſible, rouſe them, this day, to a ſerious thoughtfulneſs! *Now, thus ſaith the Lord of Hoſts, conſider your ways.* What, are your Parents going apace to heaven? Are your bretheren and ſiſters, and many of your companions of the ſame age, devoted to God, and promiſing fair to be to God for a name and for a praiſe in the church, and the world? And ſhall you only cauſe a damp in the joy of a religious family, and in the church of Chriſt, by your conduct? What will you chuſe to diſtinguiſh yourſelves in this wretched manner, by being the only perſons among many that ſhall have forgoten God, and ſeparated yourſelves from the ſeed of the righteous? What profit have you in your conduct now? What comfort can you have in reflexion? What proſpect in the approach of death?

O that I might but prevail with every one that is deſcended from thoſe who are the people of God, eſpecially, to become truly and in earneſt for God; that I might be the means of fixing them for him, and engaging them to *aſk the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, ſaying, Come, and let us join ourſelves to the Lord,*

in

in a perpetual covenant never to be forgoten! Your pious Parents are wiſhing and praying for this happy day. Your young devout relations are waiting for it, and inviting you into their ſociety; and we Miniſters would be glad to lend you the helping hand, that you may enter on the way of truth, and walk on in it to the end.

Bretheren, our hearts deſire and prayer to God for you is, that you alſo may be ſaved. Fulfil you therefore our joy, in being like minded with thoſe who have gone before you.

For what is our hope, our joy, our crown of rejoicing? Do we not deſire earneſtly that you alſo may compleat it, at the *preſence of our Lord Jeſus at his coming?*

Be ye therefore our Glory and our Joy. AMEN.

A Hymn

A Hymn of Gratitude to GOD.

1. WHEN all thy Mercies, O my God,
My riſing ſoul ſurveys;
Tranſported with the view, I'm loſt
In wonder, love, and praiſe!

2. O how ſhall words with equal warmth
The gratitude declare,
That glows within my raviſh'd heart;
But thou canſt read it there!

3. Thy Providence my life ſuſtain'd,
And all my wants redreſt,
When in the ſilent womb I lay,
And hung upon the breaſt.

4. To all my weak complaints and cries
Thy mercy lent an ear,
E'er yet my feeble thoughts had learnt
To form themſelves in Prayer.

5. Unnumber'd Comforts to my ſoul
Thy tender care beſtow'd,
Before my infant heart conceiv'd
From whom thoſe Comforts flow'd.

PAUSE I.

6. When all thy Mercies, O my God,
My riſing ſoul ſurveys;
Tranſported with the view, I'm loſt,
In wonder, love, and praiſe!

7. When in the ſlipp'ry paths of youth,
With heedleſs ſteps I ran,
Thine arm unſeen convey'd me ſafe,
And led me up to man.

8. Through

8. Through hidden dangers, toils, and deaths
It gently clear'd my way,
And through the pleaſing ſnares of Vice,
More to be fear'd than they.

9. When worn with Sickneſs oft haſt thou
With health renew'd my face;
And when in ſins and ſorrows ſunk,
Reviv'd my ſoul with grace.

10. Thy bounteous hand with worldly bliſs
Has made my cup run o'er,
And in a kind and faithful friend
Has doubled all my ſtore.

11. Ten thouſand thouſand precious gifts
My daily thanks employ,
Nor is the leaſt a chearful heart
That taſtes thoſe gifts with joy.

PAUS II.

12. When all thy Mercies, O my God,
My riſing ſoul ſurveys;
Tranſported with the view, I'm loſt
In wonder, love, and praiſe!

13. Through ev'ry period of my life,
Thy goodneſs I'll purſue,
And after death in diſtant worlds
The glorious theme renew.

14. When nature fails, and day and night
Divide thy Works no more;
My ever grateful heart, O Lord,
Thy Mercy ſhall adore.

15. Through all Eternity to Thee
A joyful ſong I'll raiſe,
For O, Eternity's too ſhort
To utter all thy praiſe.

THE END.

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